

2009

Architecture

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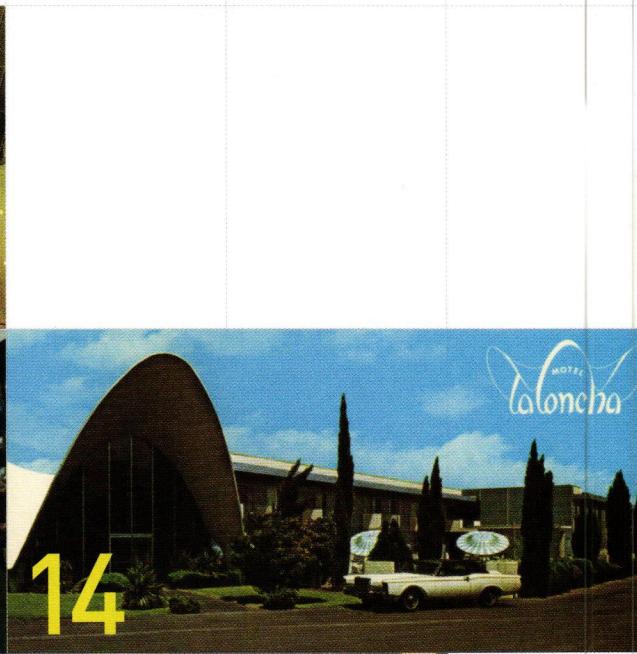
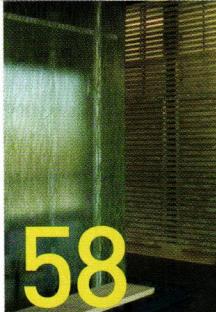
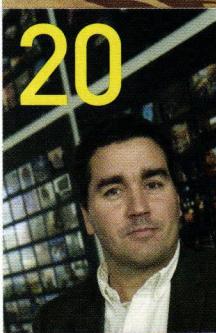
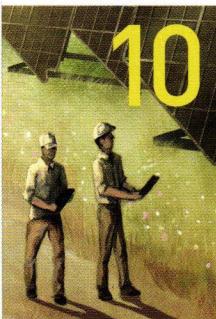
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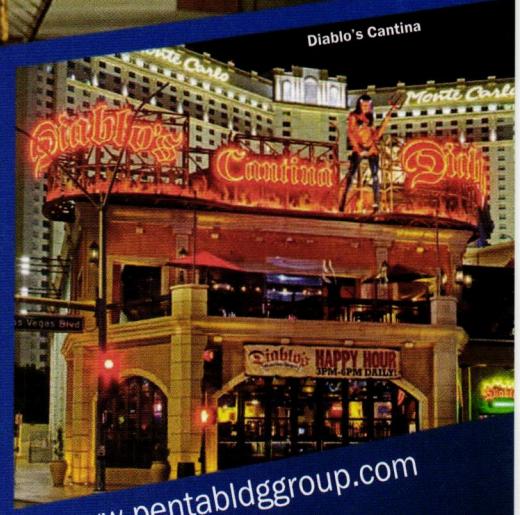
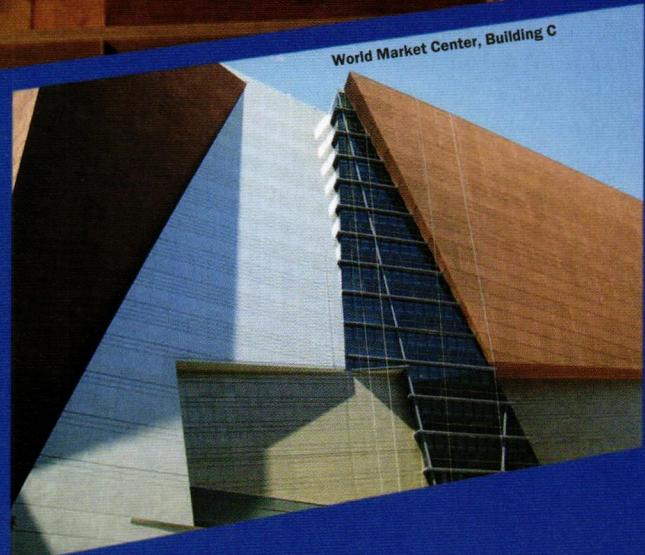
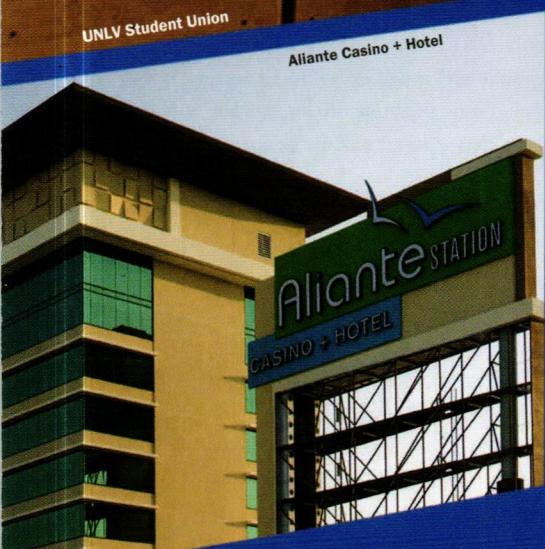
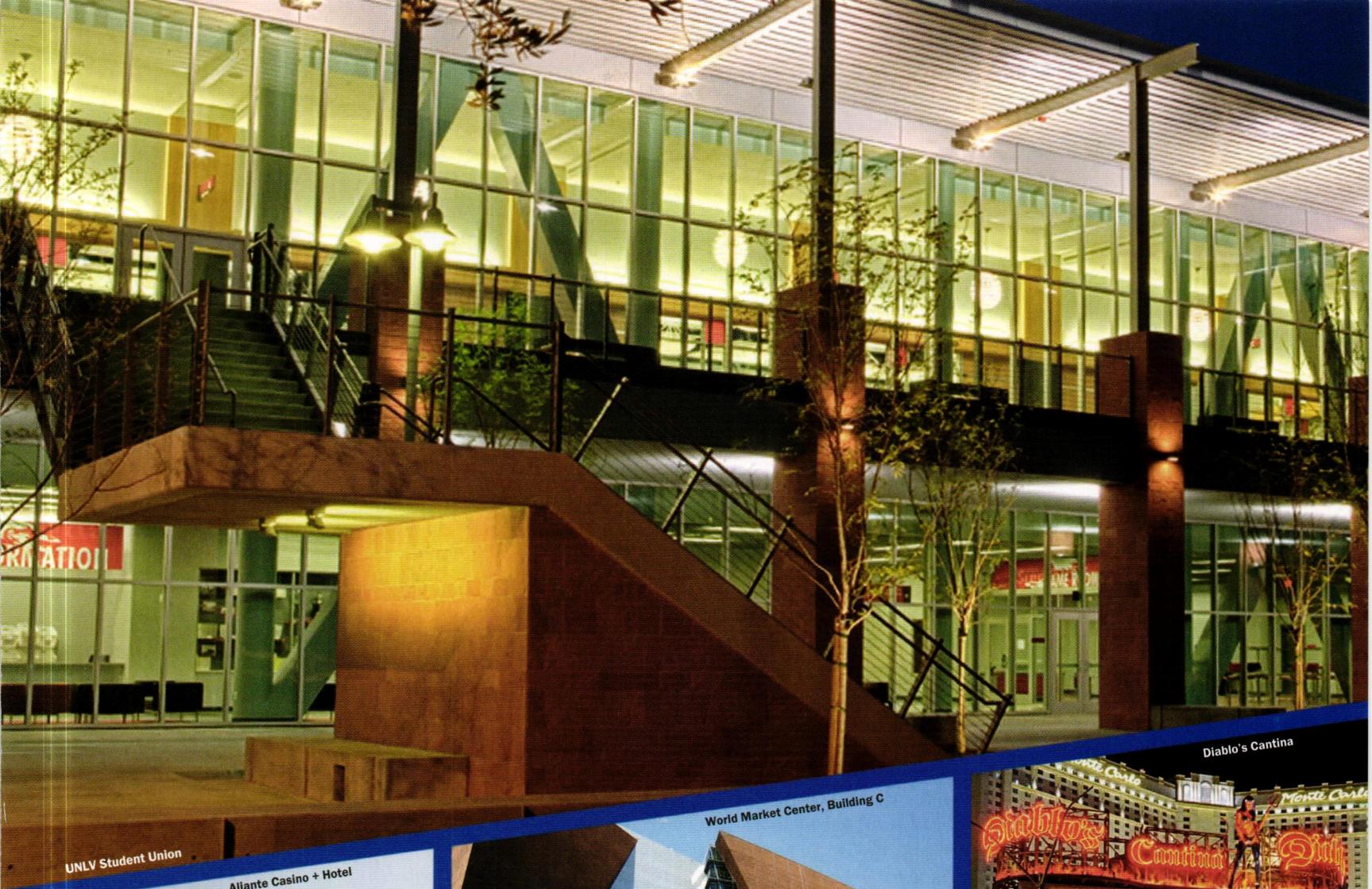
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Architecture and art have been connected since the first shelters were built thousands of years ago. And in some rare but extraordinary examples, art and architecture are inseparable. For instance, it is almost impossible to imagine an ancient Egyptian temple without visualizing myriad hieroglyphs and paintings plastering the stone walls, or the soaring grace of a Gothic cathedral without the vibrant hues of stained-glass windows carefully crafted by the hands of an artist. Though fewer projects today incorporate art, there are beautiful examples that stand out. What would the atrium in I.M. Pei's East Building of the National Gallery of Art be without Alexander Calder's massive mobile?

While cities such as Cairo and Washington, D.C., are known for their grand art and architecture, Las Vegas has some of its own, too—it's just a little bit harder to find. But not for long. This edition of *Architecture Las Vegas*, now in its ninth year, focuses on public art, the role that it plays in our community and its interaction with architecture.

In the "Artworks in Progress" feature, our editor, Phil Hagen, explores the valley's latest public-art projects and the impact they could have on our sense of place. The more notable projects are the very Vegas-themed Neon Museum and the very un-Vegas Flamingo Arroyo Trail system, which will be more contextually desert-themed and will connect central neighborhoods to the Wetlands Park on the east side of the valley. Then Hagen highlights some of the area's best existing public art in "The Vegas Art Sampler."

In "Public Art & Democracy," David Pagel probes the behind-the-scenes process that art goes through to become public. The *Los Angeles Times* art critic demonstrates that no matter how much



thought goes into a project beforehand, a work of art's true success is determined by the public discussions afterward.

While some public art goes through committees, other art programs can be the brainchild of just a few dedicated individuals who want to make a difference. That's what happened in a downtown Las Vegas neighborhood, which is the focus of Rebecca Zisch's article, "Urban Art Appreciation."

In the finale of our special public-art package, William L. Fox takes a close look at the "private public art" at MGM's CityCenter, opening later this year. Here he enlightens us about the large-scale works that will be strategically sprinkled throughout the property and free for public viewing.

In the last two feature articles, "The Green Dream" and the "AIA Nevada Design Awards," we see how architecture is more than just "function"; it is a response to program, environment and occupant. When all three of these criteria are met, a building truly becomes architecture.

Both art and architecture give rise to a more diverse and stable society, and together they create a positive image of how we see ourselves. It has been said that one sign of a community's maturity is the value it places on culture. That these cultural phenomena are becoming more prevalent and valued in Southern Nevada is a sign that our community is maturing. I believe that this issue of *Architecture Las Vegas* demonstrates our cultural growth as a modern American city and shows that our desert home is embracing artistic and architectural talent. I hope you enjoy perusing the pages of the magazine and feel inspired by the wonderful images and stories.

Sean Coulter, AIA, LEED AP
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David Page, who wrote the "Public Art & Democracy" essay on Page 44, is a Los Angeles-based art critic who writes regularly for the *Los Angeles Times* while serving as assistant professor of art theory and history at Claremont Graduate University. He taught in UNLV's art department in 1996 and 2000, and has twice curated shows at the Las Vegas Art Museum, most recently *L.A. Now*.

Not long after serving as moderator for the Art + Environment Conference at the Nevada Museum of Art in Reno, **William L. Fox** was appointed director of the institution's new Center for Art + Environment. In between those assignments, he wrote our back-page essay (Page 80) on the success of the former and the possibilities of the latter. He also contributed to our public-art report, with an essay on the CityCenter collection (Page 50). Fox has published 10 books on art, architecture and landscape, as well as numerous essays in art magazines and journals. He is the recipient of fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and National Endowment for the Humanities, and has been a visiting scholar at the Getty Research Institute and National Museum of Australia.



Bob Stoldal's retirement as vice president of news for KLAS Channel 8 has been good for *Architecture Las Vegas*. His story on our need to preserve what's left of Southern Nevada's motel history (Page 14) is his second contribution to the magazine in two issues. Stoldal, now a full-time historian, is chairman of both the Nevada State Museum and Historical Society and the City of Las Vegas' Historic Preservation Commission.

Geoff Schumacher, who wrote our Orientation essay on the state's solar power potential (Page 10), is director of community publications for Stephens Media and a weekly public affairs columnist for the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*. He is the author of two books: *Howard Hughes: Power, Paranoia & Palace Intrigue* and *Sin, Sin & Suburbia: An Essential History of Modern Las Vegas*, both published by Stephens Press.

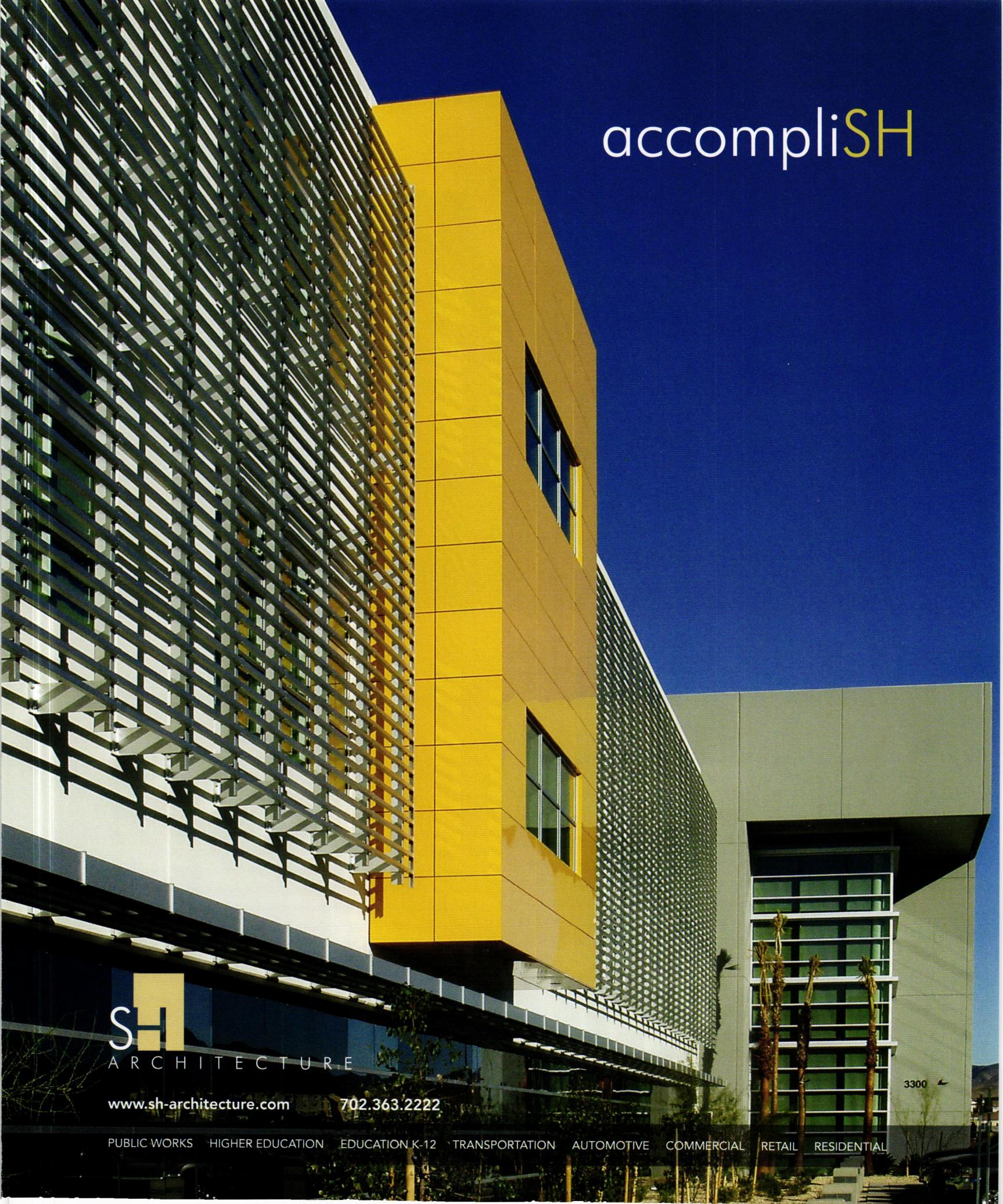
If the illustration style for "The Solar State" (Page 10) looks familiar, that's because it was created by **Casey Weldon**, a popular Las Vegas artist who moved to Brooklyn two years ago. Weldon, a graduate of the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California, is an illustrator by day and a gallery artist by night. Despite his long absence from Las Vegas, his work has appeared in several Nevada publications and galleries, as well as in many others across the country.

The team at **Studio West Photography** provided a variety of striking images for this issue, from the portraits of Downtown Design Center Director Robert Dorgan (Page 20) to the urban elements of Town Square (Page 26). Taking a reprieve from the award-winning commercial work the firm is known for, this issue shows its photographers' passion for art photography and the city they call home. Studio West is synonymous with its founder, Art Center College of Design graduate Wes Myles, who is accompanied by two photographers, Las Vegas native Ryan Reason and Michigan-born Jenn Maupin.



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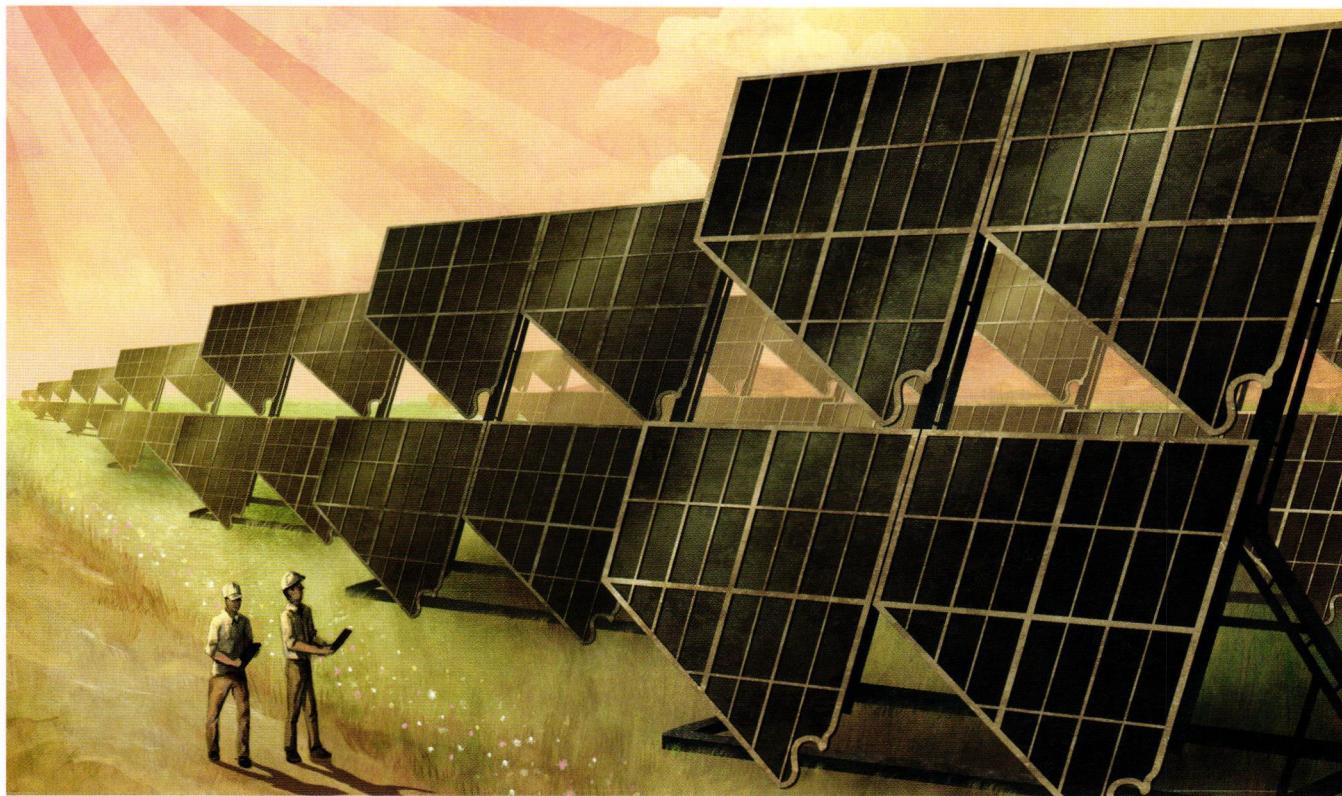
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The Solar State

You've heard about Nevada's potential to lead the energy revolution. Where's the action?

"The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew, and act anew."

— Abraham Lincoln

It's exhilarating to imagine: Within a decade, the glitz of Nevada casinos could be eclipsed by the glare from hundreds of square miles of solar panels. This embrace of renewable energy could reinvent our whole economy—not to mention the nation's—adding a sturdy second industry alongside the gambling colossus. Rather than trying to lure companies from other states, Nevada could forge its own path, bringing new jobs and development to not only the urban centers of Las Vegas and Reno, but to all corners of the state.

And with the state's unique geography and climate, this prize should be ours. It's practically being handed to us.

"There ought to be one state that proves you can do it, and it should be Nevada," former President Bill Clinton said in a speech at the National Clean Energy Summit last summer at UNLV.

Hearing this battle cry were high-profile elected officials, business leaders and energy experts who had gathered to outline a plan for

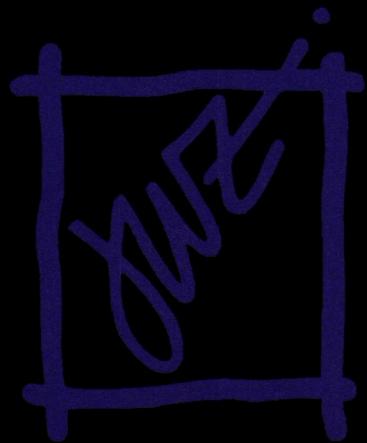
America's renewable revolution. U.S. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid of Nevada echoed Clinton's call for the state to jump into the driver's seat, calling us "the Saudi Arabia of renewable energy."

Although this paradigm shift will require a degree of political determination that has not been evident of late, Nevada history is rife with individuals who beat the odds and squelched the doubters.

Bob Boehm would like to see some of them emerge soon. The director of UNLV's Center for Energy Research recalls a bold solar vision for the state—with solar panels covering 10,000 square miles and powering the entire country—that was published about eight years ago. It remains an audacious project, yet Boehm says it can be done now using existing technologies.

One of the challenges to such a plan is the issue of storage. "A lot of people who don't like solar say that the sun only shines part of the time," he says. "That's true. It's hard to provide 100 percent of the nation's electrical requirements without storage of the electricity."

But Boehm is always ready with a solution. Solar thermal plants, he says, capture energy in a hot fluid so that electricity can be generated 24 hours. Again, this can be achieved with existing know-how. ►►

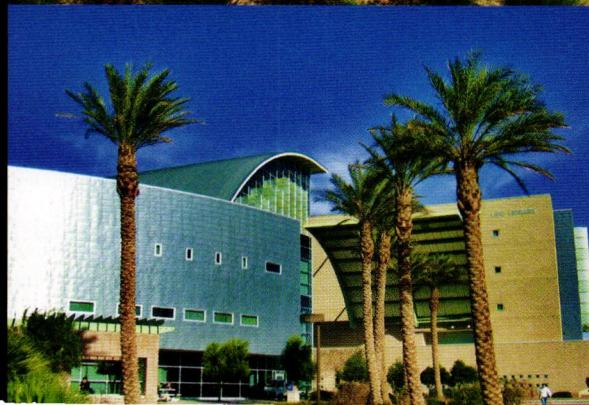
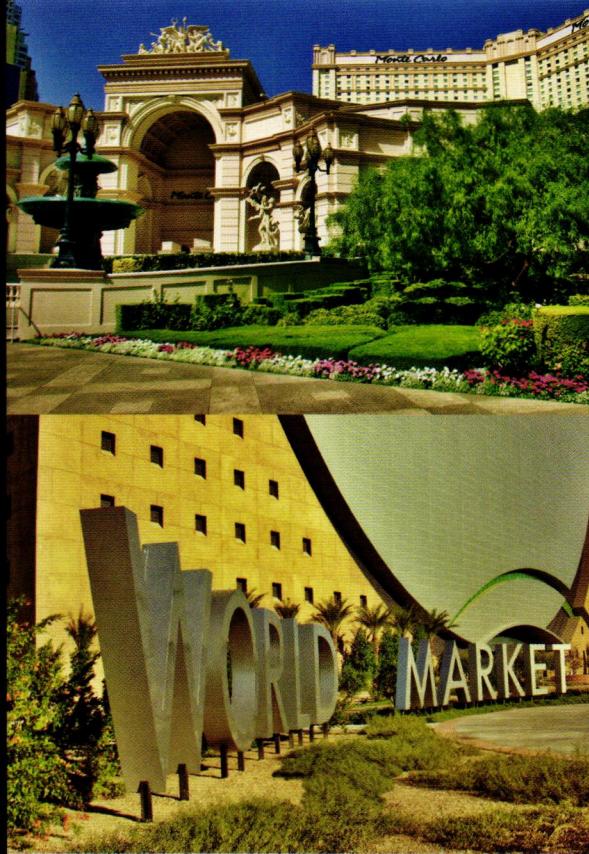


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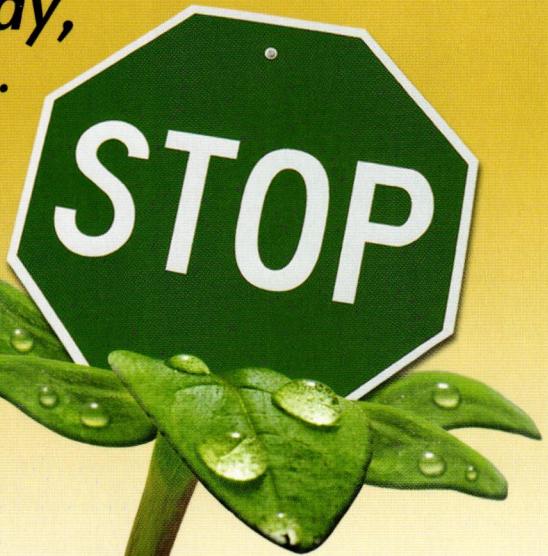
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ORIENTATION

The second issue is transmission. In order to find 10,000 square miles of open space for a giant solar plant, you must venture into the hinterlands of Nevada, where power lines do not now run. Reid is spearheading efforts to expand Nevada's electrical grid to connect the northern and southern ends of the state.

A related challenge will come from environmentalists, who are faced with balancing the global benefits of green power with the negative effects of large facilities on sensitive desert habitats. For this reason alone, it will be no simple task to run hundreds of miles of power lines across the state.

Another challenge is money. The economic meltdown has chilled the credit market, making it difficult for clean-energy entrepreneurs to secure financing for projects. To get off to a fast start, the federal government will need to alter the financial playing field with new financing and tax benefits for renewable developers.

President Barack Obama and other national leaders have proposed massive public investment in renewable energy as a smart way to put Americans back to work and start weaning the country off dirty energy sources. Call it the New Deal for the 21st century.

Nevada, meantime, also has work to do. Despite its vast solar potential, Nevada trails several nearby states, including sun-drenched Arizona and New Mexico, in providing incentives to renewable energy developers. What's more, Nevada has not enforced expectations that its main utility, NV Energy, derive at least 20 percent of its electricity from renewable sources. The number is an embarrassing 1 percent. For all its green rhetoric, NV Energy is not seen as a progressive utility.

Considering the environmental and economic obstacles, perhaps the vision of one giant solar plant powering the country is not realistic. Bruce Babbitt, former Arizona governor and Interior secretary, suggests a series of solar parks scattered across Nevada. He would have state and federal officials get together to identify several locations ideal for solar development. "Solar parks, with shared infrastructure and access to transmission lines, could both speed the approval process and reduce costs," Babbitt argues.

So, what's the revolution time line? Former Vice President and Nobel Peace Prize winner Al Gore is calling for America to produce 100 percent of its electricity from renewable sources within 10 years. He envisions large-scale investments in solar plants in the Southwest, wind farms in the Great Plains and geothermal plants in hot spots across the continent, including Northern Nevada.

As the world's highest-profile environmentalist, it's Gore's mission to advocate for an ambitious and comprehensive answer to the threats of climate change. But can it really happen?

That depends on whether Washington will take bold and bipartisan action in this age of acrimonious and incremental governance. Over the next year or two, at least, the inclination will be to move cautiously on renewable initiatives. But Washington should do the opposite, making the green revolution the catalyst for a robust economic recovery.

A similar action must occur in Carson City. Nevada is poised to lead the nation's renewable energy revolution, and it can reinvent the state's economy in the process. Establishing a vibrant renewable industry could create good jobs, invigorate dying communities and generate new revenues to improve schools, build roads and provide essential services. The state's political leaders should take a cue from Abraham Lincoln and rise to the occasion. ■



"Moonrise" by *Atsuko Parker*

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BY BOB STOLDAL



RYAN REASON, STUDIO WEST PHOTOGRAPHY

THE VANISHING MOTEL

Though most motels are mere memories of the golden age, Las Vegas has enough classics left worthy of preservation. A historian explains why we should follow through.

The Tumbleweed, Desert Rose and Royal Palms are gone. The Bagdad and Suez have also disappeared from the Strip, along with the Jamaica and the Alaska. The motels of Las Vegas are dying, and the remains of the dearly departed are scattered around the valley, with linoleum-clad concrete slabs serving as tombstones.

It's difficult to imagine that, for more than 70 years, motels were an essential part of the community's tourism industry. By 1960 they packed the Strip, from the "Welcome to Fabulous Las Vegas" sign to Fremont Street, and then east to Boulder Highway. At the height of their golden era, the late 1950s, nearly 40 motels were on Las Vegas Boulevard south of Sahara Avenue, with more than 180 in the valley.

Now fewer than a dozen good specimens remain. Motel properties have been at the wrong end of the property-values balancing act for years. The glow of their neon signs, which once so warmly welcomed the motorized tourist to the Strip, has been replaced by multistory digitized signs proclaiming the benefits of staying in billion-dollar resorts. In other places, such as Las Vegas Boulevard north of Sahara or east along Fremont Street, you'll find dusty for-sale signs in front of long-vacant motels or just empty spaces where some of our classics once stood.

With our history at the mercy of market forces, we are left in a preservation predicament: Will the Las Vegas motel be found only on old postcards, or will a new business model emerge that preserves the last of these historic structures?

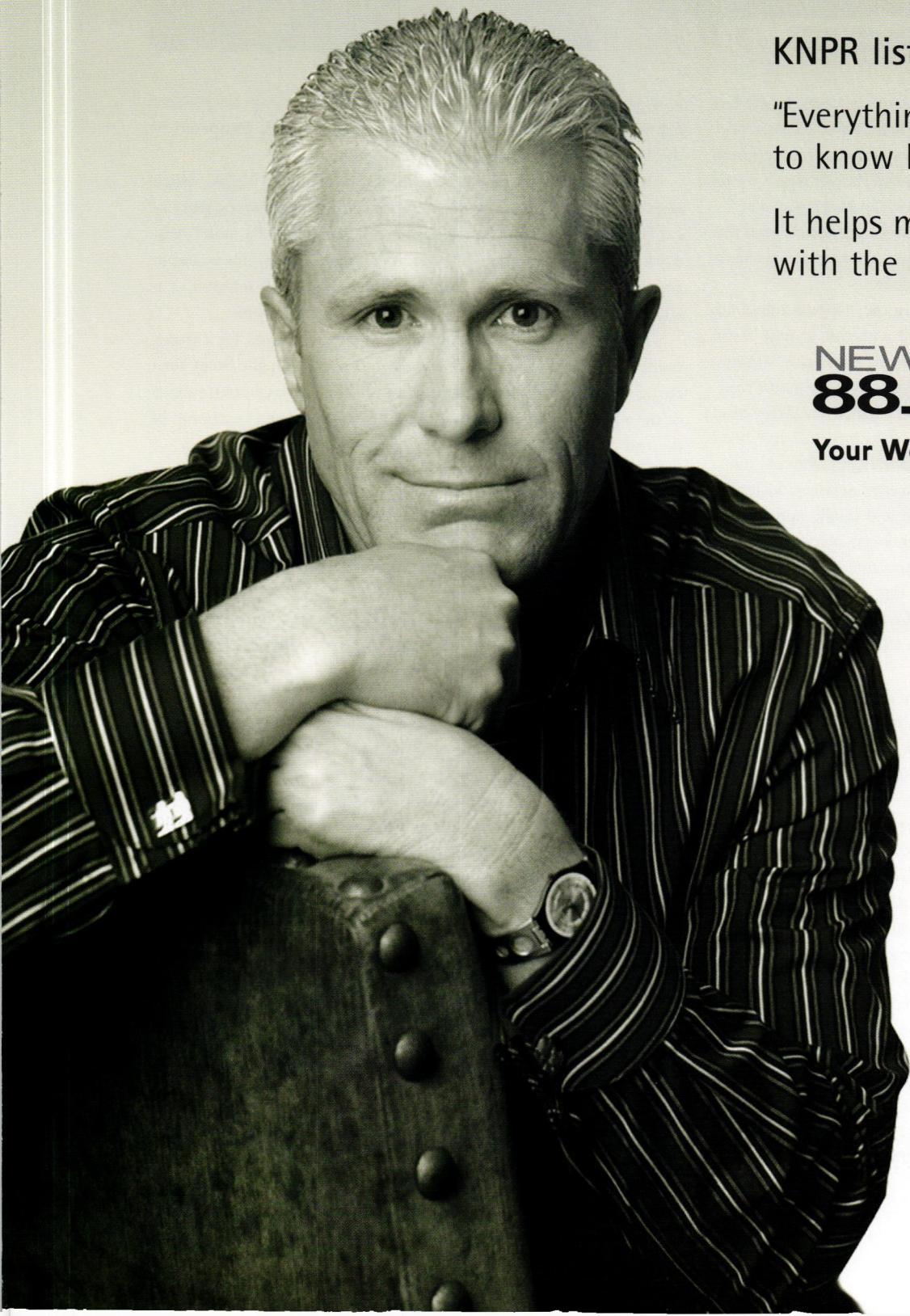
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Motels represent an interesting period in Las Vegas history, when the individual and his privacy were top priorities. Unlike in larger resorts, with their frenetic bells and buzzers constantly beckoning, the motel guest got to choose his own pace. The buildings were set up to facilitate these consumer preferences, starting with the manager's office right off the road, where guests could discreetly check in and then park in front of their rooms.

The architecture of Las Vegas' surviving single-story motels was typical of that era. From the air they look like the letters L, U or parallel I's. Outside the office would usually be a two-story neon sign designed to catch the driver's eye and show off the motel's motif. At the El Mirador and the Hitchin' Post, for example, the traveler could choose either a Spanish or cowboy/western theme.

These motels, with all due respect to the Mirage and Excalibur ►►

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The city's first "auto court," the Down Town Camp (left), and two motel classics from the 1950s.



POSTCARDS COURTESY BOB STOLDAL

megaresorts, represented the first "family era" in Las Vegas. In the late 1940s, the Bonanza Lodge boasted "fully tiled bathrooms," a heated pool and "grassed play yard." This family-oriented advertising was common among the Fremont Street motels, including the Purple Sage, a motel built in 1950 that, along with "seven-foot beds," boasted a play area.

Few of today's 2 million Las Vegas have any idea about this important chapter of our tourism, let alone know that this truly American phenomenon had begun long before.

With the start of mass production during the 1910s, automobiles became affordable for much of America, and with that change, travel was no longer limited to trains. During this time, Las Vegas, working with their counterparts in Utah and California, created a regional roadway between Salt Lake City and Los Angeles. Called the Arrowhead Trail, it ran through our city (a stretch that would eventually be called Las Vegas Boulevard) and connected to the developing national highway system. The new motorized tourist needed services, including places to rest overnight. This led to private and public auto camps, which led to rental cabins and finally to auto courts and motels.

In the 1920s, architect Arthur Heimeman came up with the idea of creating a series of small hotels to serve the automobile-traveling public along the California coast. At first, he used the term "motor hotel," then shortened it to "mo-tel," and in 1925 he copyrighted the word "motel."

Meantime, in Las Vegas, tourists had a difficult time finding a place to sleep that wasn't a traditional hotel or didn't require camping equipment. Then came J. Warren Woodard, who, besides serving as Clark County sheriff, became Las Vegas' first automobile dealer, selling Fords, Dodges and Hudsons. In 1925 he opened the Down Town Camp, which offered more than just a flat spot of land; he promised his customers "clean cabins," "shower baths," a kitchen, a garage and free ice water. These were significant improvements for the traveler, but still a step away from motel-style accommodations, as Woodard's promised kitchen and shower baths were communal.

No motels were listed in the 1931 Las Vegas telephone directory; the only automotive accommodations (all six of them, including Woodard's) are listed under "Camp Grounds." But as work began on Boulder Dam that year, and the state re-legalized gambling and made divorces easier, the motel industry took off.

By the mid-1930s, the Home Motel opened at 1401 Las Vegas Boulevard (now an empty lot next to the Rincon Criollo café). Just like home, the new motel promised private showers and baths, and mattresses with "inner springs." A large market was drawn to these

new comforts, as well as to the motel prices and privacy—two features most hotels lacked. Soon, dozens of motels prospered in the Las Vegas area.

Most notable in the first wave was El Rancho Vegas, which opened on April 3, 1941, with 63 rooms on the southwest corner of Las Vegas Boulevard and Sahara Avenue. El Rancho had a motel's primary features—it promoted "every room with a bath," for example, and you could park in front of your room—but it was referred to as a hotel, thanks to the presence of a showroom and casino.

At the time, the Clark County building code called for a maximum height of two stories for hotels and motels on the Strip. That changed in 1955 when the county commission allowed construction of the nine-story Riviera Hotel. This proved to be the beginning of the end of Las Vegas Strip motels.



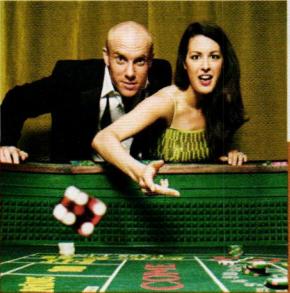
Today the future looks bleak for this part of Las Vegas history. The few remaining Strip motels will likely hang on until the next building boom, when these important artifacts will join the ghosts of tourism past.

One way to prevent this is to consider the creation of a historic motel district. A similar strategy has saved portions of U.S. Route 66. That famous road, which once hosted a string of amenities from Chicago to Los Angeles, was removed from the federal highway system a quarter-century ago. Since then, by popular demand, preservation efforts have brought the road brought back to life, along with some of its motels, gas stations and restaurants.

One potential site for a historic motel district is just north of Sahara Avenue between the 2000 and 2400 blocks of Las Vegas Boulevard, where the motels have not yet been turned into apartments with the rent due weekly. Sitting in the shadow of the 1,100-foot-tall Stratosphere, the Holiday, the Fun City and their neighbors are holding the line on traditional motel business. But these excellent, largely preserved examples are at risk of succumbing to another high-rise project.

Another active motel area is north of the intersection of Main Street and Las Vegas Boulevard. However, its current activities are of the "XXX" variety. With the Cactus and Oasis motels at one end offering fantasy rooms and free adult movie channels, the Olympic Garden strip joint in the middle, and the Talk of the Town adult bookstore at the other end, restoring this motel corridor would be a long shot.

Perhaps the best preservation opportunity lies on East Fremont, which has a collection of motels from the 1940s and '50s that are not ►►



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PRESERVATION



The Clark Inn (left), one of the author's favorites, is long gone, but the old Holiday sign still brightens Las Vegas Boulevard.

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far from their original forms. You might even say that this stretch—once part of U.S. Route 66—still has some of that old motel magic.

These buildings have had challenges, from battles with billion-dollar resorts to the closing of Fremont to eastbound traffic. And, in some cases, time has added layers that would be difficult to remove. For example, the owner of the Alicia (once the Las Vegas Motel, "a place for conservative travelers") bought the Fremont Motel next door and the other neighboring motels between Maryland Parkway and 13th Street, so now the entire north side of the block is the "fully remodeled" Alicia.

In the 2000 block of Fremont, just before Charleston Boulevard, there is an interesting cluster of motels, including the Safari, Sky Ranch, Roulette, and Town and Country. Although their heated pools are filled to the brim with dirt and rocks, their still-intact neon signs identify them as motels from the golden era.

At the end of this stretch of motels, standing as a beacon for all to see, is the symbol of survival, the Blue Angel. Built in the late 1950s, this motel was once a commercial center that included a fine restaurant as well as a popular teenage drive-in in the 1960s. Today, on the roof, it features one of the most familiar icons of the golden motel days: the rotating blond-haired blue angel.

+

One form of motel preservation is already underway: The Clark County Museum in Henderson has created a small exhibit called "Mobile America," which includes a travel trailer and Cabin 14 from an unknown Las Vegas motor court. Found in a local backyard, the single cabin has been restored to show how it looked in the 1930s and '40s.

The nonprofit Neon Museum, along with saving signs from long-gone motels, is preserving another important piece of our motel history: the lobby of La Concha, designed by famous Los Angeles architect Paul Revere Williams in the 1950s. It was saved at a cost of several hundred thousand dollars and moved to the site of the future Neon Museum (see story on Page 36), where it will be repurposed as a visitor center.

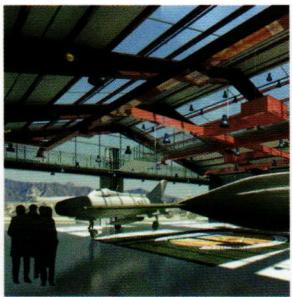
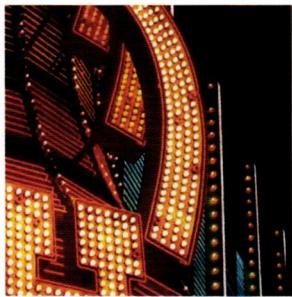
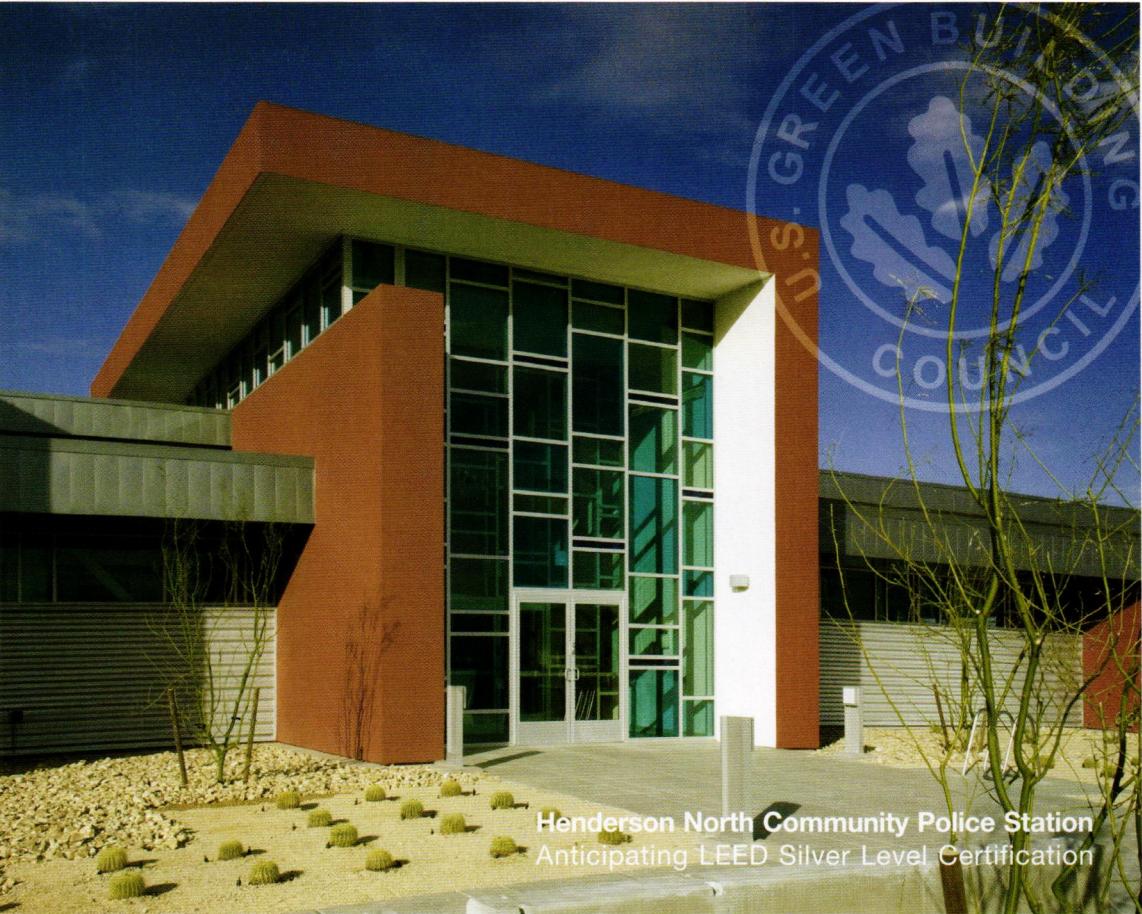
And there is more good news, perhaps. Las Vegas Boulevard, from the welcome sign to Washington Avenue downtown, has been declared an All-American Road by the U.S. Department of Transportation as part of its National Scenic Byways Program. Congress established the program in 1991 to preserve and protect the nation's scenic roads in order to promote tourism and economic development. Las Vegas Boulevard was awarded this designation in part because of the historic motels along it, and with the honor comes the ability to seek federal grants "for planning as well as enhancing and promoting" the roadway.

Now there's an idea. If nothing else, our new All-American Road sounds like a great opportunity to start discussing what to do with our remaining motel history before it's all gone. ■

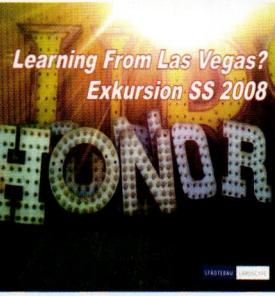
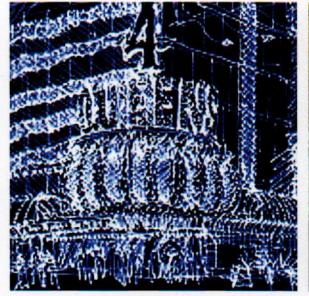
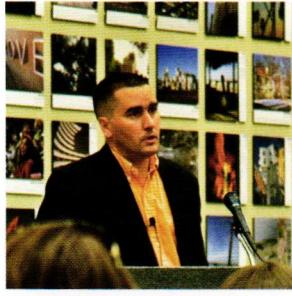
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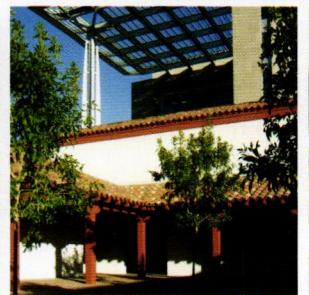
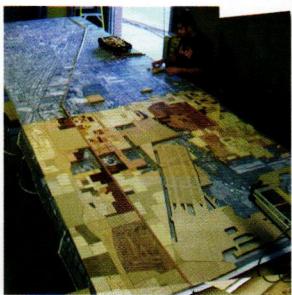
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RYAN REASON, STUDIO WEST PHOTOGRAPHY

The Shapers of Things to Come

From their new downtown studio, Robert Dorgan and his Design Center students are pursuing revitalization of what's around them, one project at a time



On a mid-November evening, Robert Dorgan, Associate AIA, stands near a banquet table that's slowly being relieved of its finger food. He and nearly 200 others are in the freshly painted gallery that adjoins the Fifth Street School gymnasium for a presentation by John Norquist of the Congress for the New Urbanism. As Dorgan mingles with the roomful of architects and students, he's secretly savoring the moment he's been dreaming about: This newly revitalized urban space is being put to good use, with UNLV's Downtown Design Center in the middle of the action.

Dorgan was practically made to seize this opportunity. The University of Minnesota alumnus has studied and taught urban planning, and he's lived in major cities on both sides of the Atlantic. He joined UNLV as an associate professor of architecture in 2007 after several stints as a visiting assistant professor, and he was named director of the UNLV Downtown Design Center as it was preparing to relocate to the Fifth Street School.

Dorgan sees the center and its new home as a crossroads for urban revitalization in Las Vegas. What's more, this new lab is a chance to impart his insights and accumulated knowledge to those who could reshape the cityscape surrounding it.

+

"This is a model that the students are putting together about downtown," says Dorgan, giving a tour of the center's studio, where graduate students work on thesis projects. He's pointing to the large table topped with wood blocks that have been carefully arranged into a three-dimensional map of downtown. "We started it last year with some of the undergraduate studios, and each student built one [city] block. This semester we started with our thesis students, and each has built one block. So the idea is each semester we're down here we'll continue to grow this model of downtown."

The beauty of the model is that it allows students to remove city blocks and replace them with their own ideas, such as a fully renovated Huntridge Theater, an affordable housing concept, a retrofitted City Hall or a proposed location for an art museum. In 10 years the students will have created a new downtown, which they can continually contrast with a satellite view of the actual ►►

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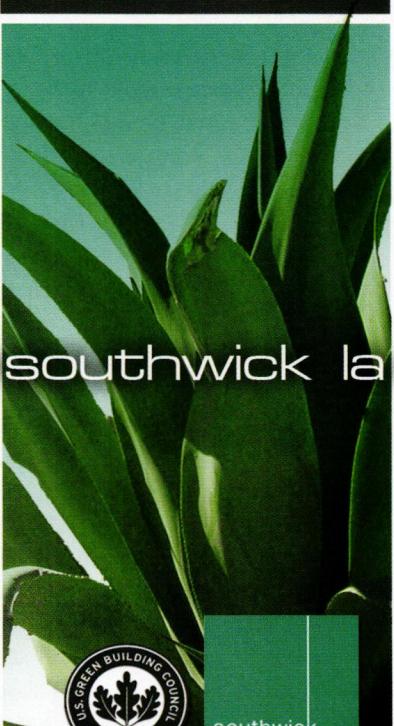
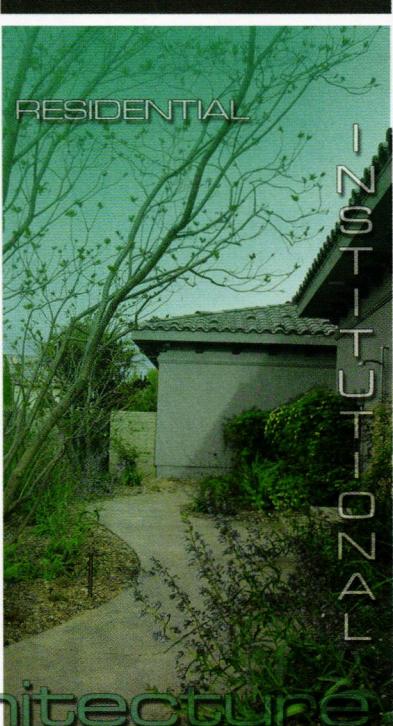
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downtown (circa 2008) that covers a nearby table.

Although such work is often theoretical, there is potential for Design Center projects to influence the built environment. For example, while touring the studio, the state's critical infrastructure analyst, Robert Hoyle, immediately recognized the model's potential as a tool for studying disaster preparedness, emergency response, hostage situations and motorcade routes. "It's something we can use for ideas," says Hoyle, who works with the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department and Nevada Homeland Security as manager of the Silver Shield project. "It's one thing when you see the urban environment in a photo, but when you see actual scale models like that you can visualize collateral damage from any kind of attack."

Dorgan would love to work with Silver Shield on a future project; he plans to pursue that matter as soon as he gets a breather from the first-semester roller-coaster ride. There will be plenty of other collaborative possibilities, too. "We have politicians coming through, we have professionals coming through," he says. "A lot of people are seeing our work." Mayor Oscar Goodman, he adds, would soon be coming to review the fourth-year students' group project, a detailed live-work complex designed to be built on the vacant lot at Ninth and Fremont streets where the Ambassador Hotel once stood. "What a great opportunity to share that," Dorgan says. "Our hope is that it will start to get some traction, to get into the light, and that people will see it and start some conversations."

+ + +

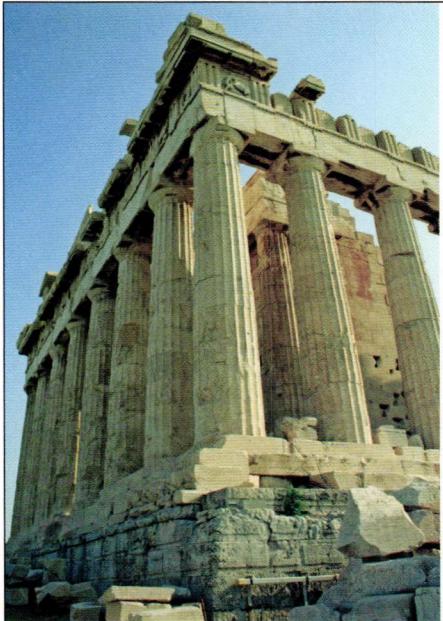
The Design Center certainly has an ear in the City of Las Vegas' Office of Business Development. Its deputy director, Steve van Gorp, Associate AIA, was an instructor when the UNLV program—then known as the Downtown Design Studio—occupied a single space in the Fifth Street School before it was closed for renovation in 2004. "They came in with a proposal to create the Downtown Design Center with what is now three studios and offices," he says. "That was very well received."

"UNLV had been teaching classes there for about 10 years," explains Dorgan, who'd worked with the old studio during his previous UNLV stints. "There's always been this idea in the dean's office and the [School of Architecture] director's office to create a bigger presence for UNLV downtown and get more involved with what the city and community are doing there. I was just hired to get things off the ground. There have been several people behind the scenes doing the planning for the last few years and putting all the pieces in place."

Design Center Director Robert Dorgan and his UNLV students with their wood-block map of downtown.



RYAN REASON, STUDIO WEST PHOTOGRAPHY



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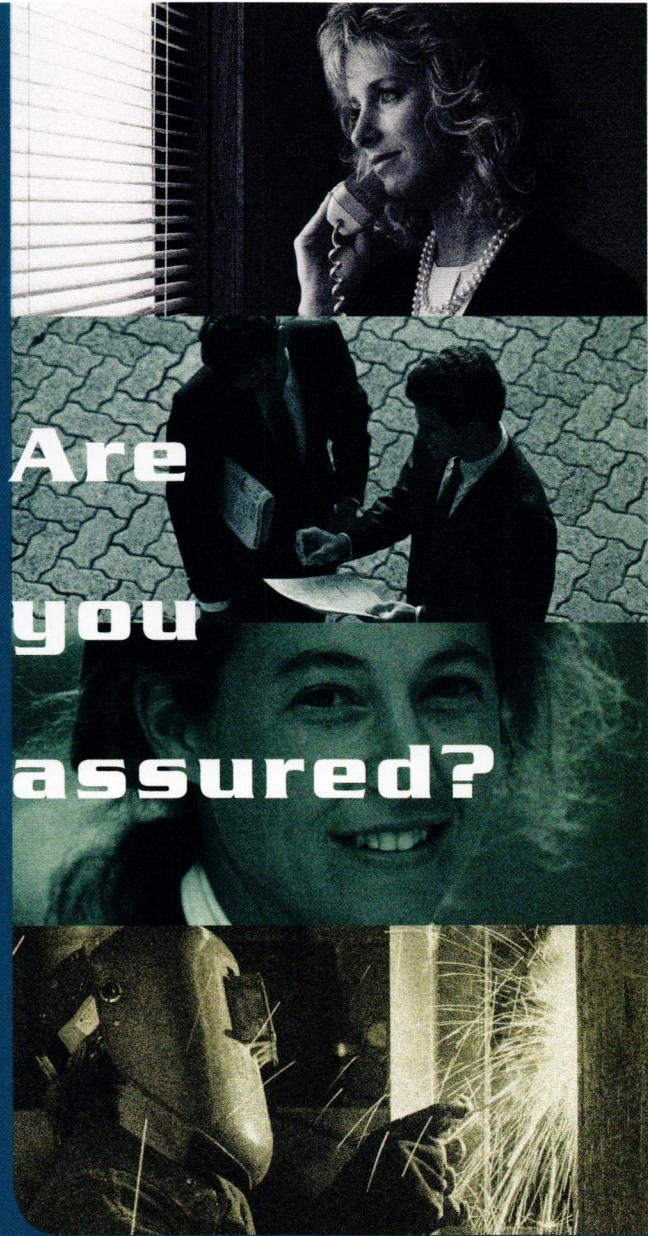
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PROFILE

“

If you want to give anyone credit for truly making the design center ... and what it's grown into, that would be Robert Dorgan.

— Jeffrey Koep, dean of UNLV's College of Fine Arts

”

Those people included Van Gorp; the dean of UNLV's College of Fine Arts, Jeffrey Koep; former School of Architecture director Michael Kroelinger, AIA; and architect Ray Lucchesi, AIA. “Certainly the idea of a Downtown Design Center is something that we've been championing ever since we got down there,” Koep says. “I had done some reading on other design centers in other cities, and I felt UNLV needs one of these—and Las Vegas needs one. But if you want to give anyone credit for truly making the design center ... and what it's grown into, that would be Robert Dorgan.”

After earning his Master of Architecture degree from the University of Minnesota and teaching there for several years, he attended the Architectural Association in London, where he earned a Graduate Design Diploma. He also lived for a short time in a French mountain monastery designed by Le Corbusier, where he had one of the most profound experiences of his career. “I get up to my room and close the door behind me, and the skies just completely unleashed,” he recalls. “It was the most amazing thing, to sit in that building and watch the rain. It was a moment.” He taught at Virginia Tech, Georgia Tech and the University of Maryland. He worked as a designer, software developer and project manager for Coca-Cola's branding and marketing division, and as a team leader in charge of redesigning Papa John's corporate image.

Koep was intrigued by Dorgan's work as director of the Institute for Small Town Studies, an educational nonprofit in Fairfield, Iowa, that provides community design assistance and small-town planning services. “There was no question that Robert had the best handle on what we were trying to do,” Koep says of the hiring process. “He had the experience. He had worked with the Downtown Studio, and he wanted to work 100 percent in that capacity. What was really important is we had an individual who was a recognized designer that understood planning and was a good organizer, but also recog-

nized that the more different disciplines you get involved with, the richer the center will become for the community.”

The Design Center needed someone who could relate to UNLV's various design-related departments—art, theater, sociology—and play a role in an expanded “brain trust” in the future. What's more, UNLV needed someone who could inspire and cultivate young minds.

“It's been pretty cool just being down here and having the urban experience,” says fourth-year student Josh Moser. “Granted, Las Vegas isn't the ideal urban environment, but to be down here ... normally we're stuck in a studio all the time at the university.”

Dorgan and instructor Harry Ray, AIA, encouraged their students to take to the streets in the name of urban research, which the fourth-year students did en masse. They checked out different restaurants and became familiar with the owners. They developed a new appreciation for mom-and-pop shops while exploring Fremont Street. They checked out existing live-work projects downtown.

“Working on that type of space—a live-work—is really exciting to me now,” Moser says. “It would be really exciting to live in this type of environment where I wouldn't have to use a car, where I wouldn't have to travel very far. It makes me want to design this way because it's so convenient. It makes sense to live this type of lifestyle.”

This effect on architecture students' development may some day be the legacy of the Downtown Design Center, but there may be tangible rewards along the way, too. Mayor Goodman did show up to view their project and gave his enthusiastic approval. This sparked a buzz among the students. Perhaps they would get the chance to show the owners of that vacant lot at Ninth and Fremont what's possible when young minds are shaped by the right individuals at the right time with the right ideas and right outlook. ■

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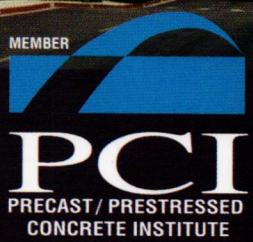
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BY JENNIFER ROBISON



RYAN REASON, STUDIO WEST PHOTOGRAPHY

MALL INTUITION

Town Square succeeds in drawing a crowd because, authentic or not, it gives us the urban space we desire



Since it opened in November 2007, Town Square has emerged as a favorite haunt of Las Vegas. A large part of the draw is the outdoor mall's two parks, 11 restaurants, 18-screen cinema and 150 retailers, from Apple to Zumiez. Convenience is another integral part of the formula, as Town Square lies next to the confluence of Interstates 15 and 215. And the fact that the \$750 million attraction is just a few minutes south of the Las Vegas Strip has helped, as tourists comprise 30 percent of the foot traffic.

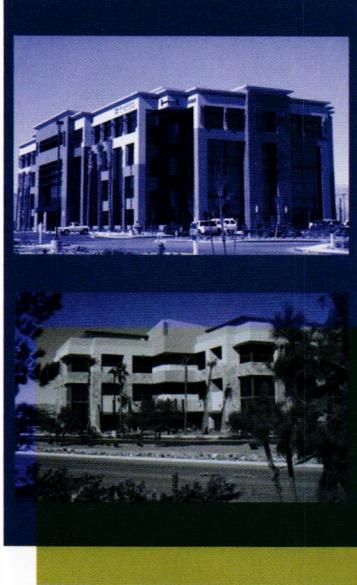
But in a city with regional malls aplenty, the key to Town Square's allure may be some old planning ideas—such as walkability, scale and mixed uses—that create a new urban feel for Las Vegas.

Architect and urban-planning expert Robert Fielden, FAIA, sees it as a local longing for "Main Street," and Town Square gives us a quick fix. "It is a contemporary marketing concept for an almost postmodern idea in the sense that it draws upon this whole idea of New Urbanism," says the senior principal of RAFI, a local architecture firm. "And I think it works that way."

Local mall regulars—many of whom, like most Las Vegas, migrated from other cities—miss the urbanism of their hometowns. Sideeqah Young, for example, says the narrow streets (complete with parallel parking and meters) that intersect the village of shops remind her of the downtown in her native Seattle. For Lisa Jasper, Town Square feels like the high-end outdoor shopping meccas of Los Angeles. Marilyn Doran sees shades of the Zona Rosa mall in Kansas City, where she and her husband lived before moving to Henderson a few years ago.

"You can find whatever you want here," she says. "It's very comfortable, clean, safe and friendly. I tell all my friends to come see it."

It's fitting that consumers recall other places when they step into Town Square, because the architects took their planning cues largely from far-flung retail hot spots. From Barcelona's Rambla to Boston's Beacon Street, a wide range of world-renowned gathering places informed the design, which is why you see such a variety of façades at Town Square. Retailers designed their exteriors within developer ►►



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Three reasons why Las Vegas loves Town Square: walkability, sit-ability and the ability to park urban-style.

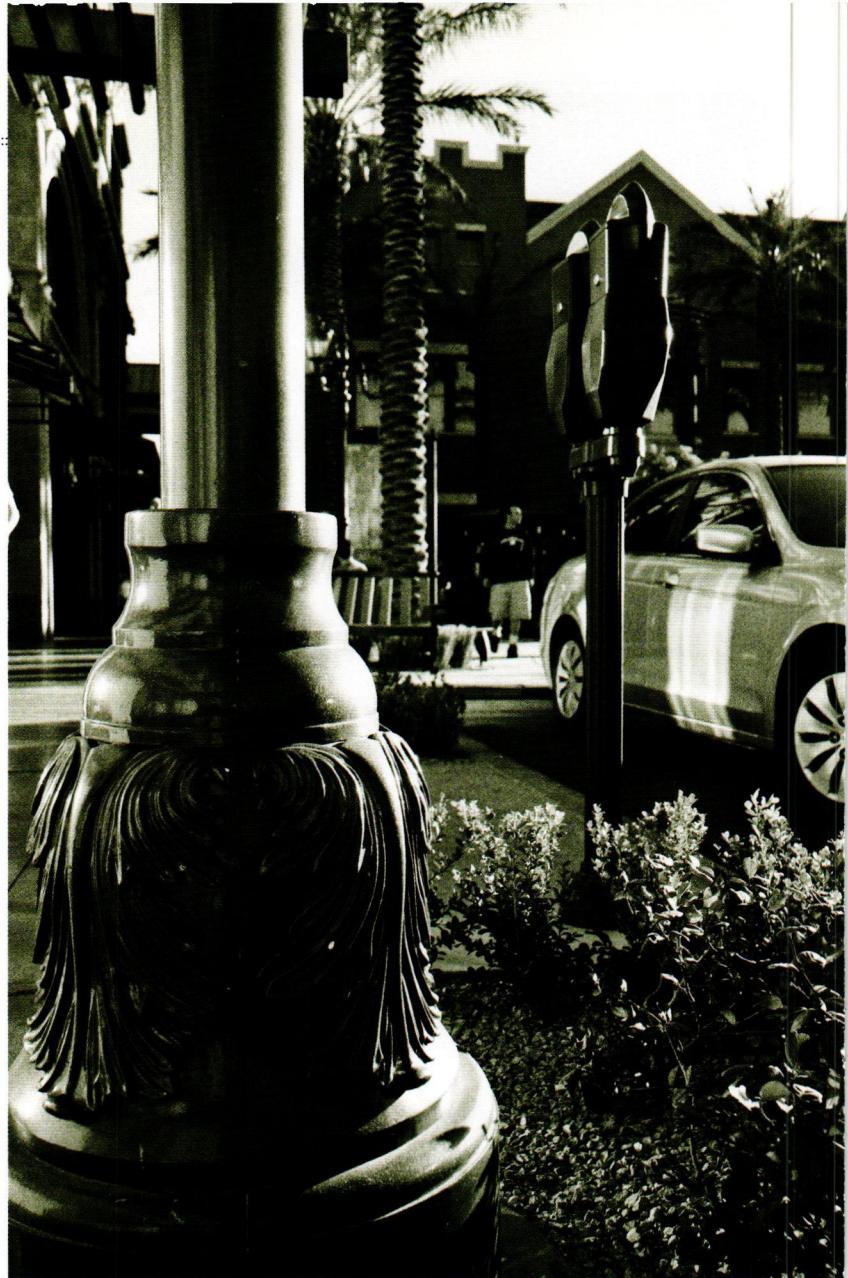
guidelines, says Tony Van Vliet, a partner with Development Design Group, the Baltimore firm that drew up the master plan for Town Square. But at a certain point they were given freedom to choose their own styles. The results range from the faint echo of Moorish Revivalism in the ornate arches over Sephora to the sleek, modern lines of Robb & Stucky.

Besides avoiding architectural monotony, planners hoped that putting a red-brick building a la New England next to a Southwestern stucco structure would lend a timeless quality to Town Square. "With variety," Van Vliet says, "you feel like a place has grown up over time and not just landed there all at once."

+

Not everybody is wild about the aesthetic. Fielden, for one, thinks it's too Disney. "These periodic pieces that are faux become foes," he says. "They kind of clash. It's not part of the reality around us. I think the architecture of the [Las Vegas Premium Outlets mall] downtown works better and is more vibrant. It's more a product of the times."

Ralph Stern, a former UNLV architecture professor and coauthor



of *Urbanizing the Mojave Desert: Las Vegas*, thinks Town Square looks like someone assembled a bunch of design kits for a dozen or so eras. "You have all these different glue-ons," says Stern, who also has taught at Columbia and MIT. "You get your big box and then, like a child's game, you can dress it up as a Renaissance big box, or a Frank Lloyd Wright big box, or an Art Deco big box. But they really are all just appliqués."

Van Vliet's response: *Well, yeah.* Town Square is, after all, an entertainment center. "This is not architecture as an intellectual exercise," he says. "It's intentionally putting in that visual stimulation and variety by using themes. Can you say they crash and collide, and that you wouldn't see the styles together in an authentic town in Europe or America? Yes. But it's a scripted experience, so it's not really that different from the Strip in that sense. We were trying to create a fun, lighthearted place people can enjoy with their families."

Fielden's concern is the authenticity of the experience. "It's a regional shopping center that they've tried to give an urban character to," he says. "But for it to be truly urban, you'd have to be able to walk to it or live around it, and you can't. It's just another marketing tool." ►►

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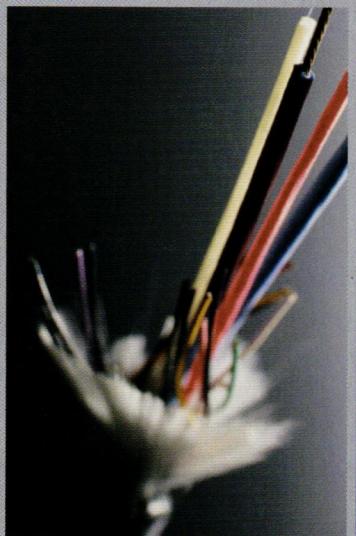
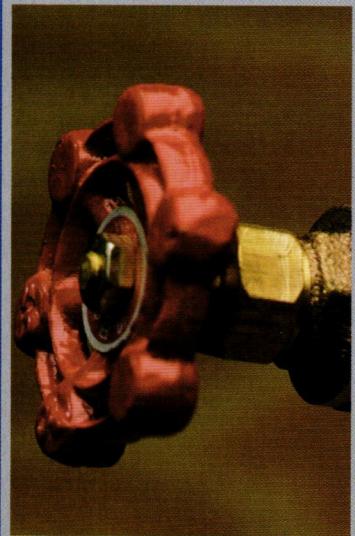
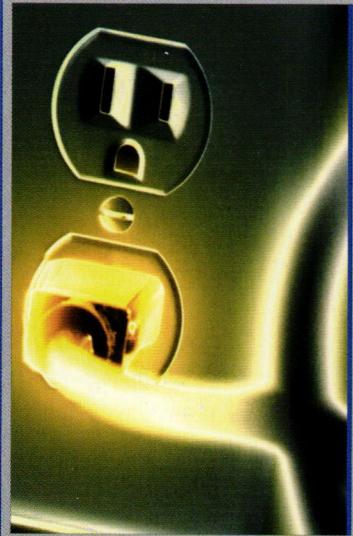


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Building in more authenticity would enhance Town Square as a community gathering place and—in a city where residents always seem to be running to the next new thing—help keep it that way. What will happen later this year, Fielden asks, when CityCenter opens its urban-style shopping and entertainment complex a couple of miles up Las Vegas Boulevard? “Town Square could become yesterday’s news,” he says.

+ + +

Las Vegas are used to faux, temporary urban living. Just look at the Strip, which, by default, has long served as the heart of the city. There hasn’t been the authentic urbanism—private or public—that brings people together socially, that helps tie them together as a community.

The District at Green Valley Ranch, the rage before Town Square came along, made a good effort. The outdoor mall even came with condominiums and apartments, which were built above many of the shops. Alas, the promise of full-time residents fell short, and the District’s urban energy today rises and falls with upscale shopping and eating habits. In times like these, that often means there’s not much of a pulse.

Like the District, Town Square mainly serves the upper-middle class, which may be good for business but doesn’t elevate it to a true urban space, Stern says. “Like so much of Las Vegas, it participates in this realm where they try to manufacture public space, but it’s still a private development. It’s a highly controlled space. I would think if you decided to play music out on the street in an impromptu fashion, security would probably come up to you relatively quickly.”

The loss is “a social richness” from the lack of “chance encounters that true urban environments engender,” Stern says. “It’s the guy

on the street playing music who you get to know because he’s there every Tuesday afternoon when you leave work. That allows for a much greater level of social cohesion and understanding than if you’re always in shopping mode.”

But it is also possible that Las Vegas like Town Square just as it is: a place with great retail and entertainment options, a walkable outdoor environment, and the ubiquitous programmed music instead of out-of-tune saxophones.

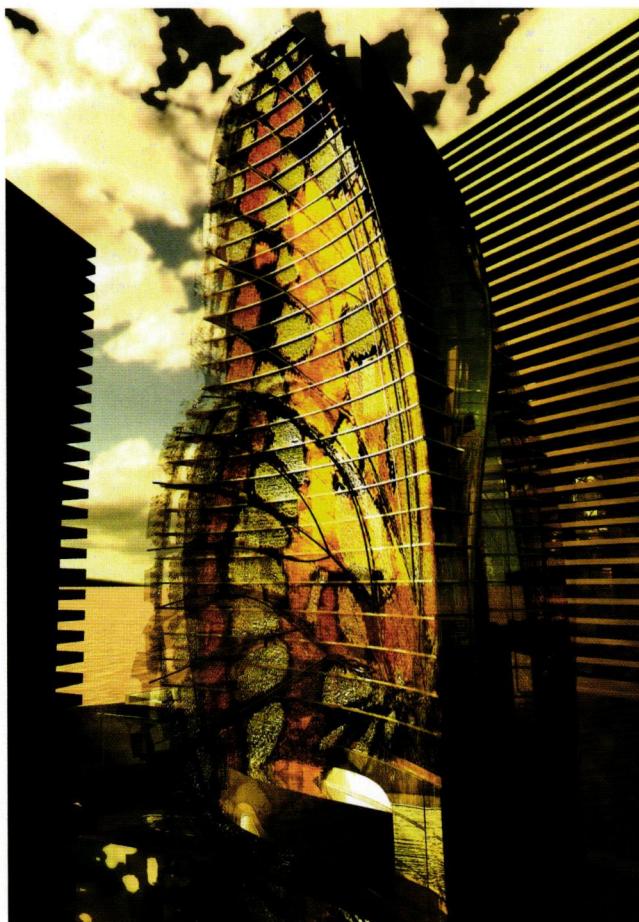
“It’s a really good meeting spot,” says Barbara Karas, sitting on the artificial grass in the mall’s central park one Saturday afternoon, along with a friend and a passel of kids and dogs. “We can bring picnics here. It’s outdoors so you don’t feel stifled. It has a park-like feel.”

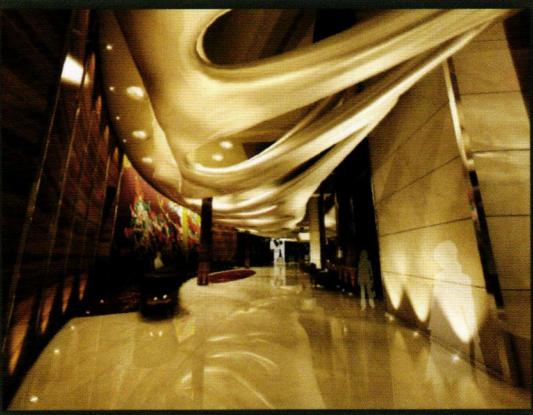
That qualifies as social cohesion. Even if it didn’t, creating urban authenticity isn’t necessarily a commercial developer’s responsibility; “good” architecture, in this case, is about luring people and showing them a good time.

Stern acknowledges that Town Square’s aesthetic liberties serve a purpose. Even if consumers don’t notice stylistic quotations, they do register designs that foster human scale and offer perceptual richness or visual complexity.

Van Vliet wholeheartedly agrees with that assessment. “Whether a place works has a lot to do with the scale and proportion of space,” he says. “You’re looking at the size of the parks, and the proportion and spacing between buildings. We were trying to get a comfortable scale that feels more intuitive to people.”

So far, it’s hard to argue with the success of that intuition. ■





THE BUTTERFLY WILL TAKE FLIGHT IN DUBAI

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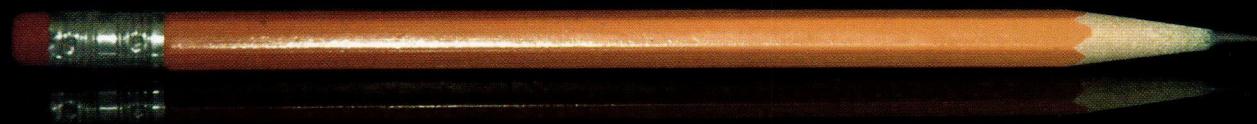
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A Special Report

artworks in progress

Several public projects on the horizon are vying to build on the essence of Las Vegas

BY PHIL HAGEN

“ Public art is what makes a city's identity. It represents the essence of the city, and cities that don't have art are sterile and lifeless. Art stimulates our environment. It makes a statement: This is where our creative juices flow. Without art, it's just an empty, barren desert. ”

— MAYOR OSCAR GOODMAN

ead the mayor's quote carefully and notice how he walks the line between public art in general and Las Vegas in particular without really connecting the two in the present tense. Because he can't—not yet. If he could, we wouldn't need him to define and inspire public art in the first place—we'd be talking about it ourselves, we'd be experiencing it, we'd be wading in a high tide of creative juice. Instead, after a century, we are still a work in progress, a city in search of an identity.

Of course, we're not a city totally barren of public art, either. To start with, there's our favorite trump card. “The Las Vegas Strip is the largest private investment in public art in human history,” Brian Paco Alvarez told the *Las Vegas Weekly* in 2006. And art critic Dave Hickey told *The New York Times* in 2001 that the Strip's chief element, neon, spawned “the only indigenous visual culture on the North American continent.”

This evidence may be good material for articles or panel discussions, but deep down inside our soul, Las Vegas is a dichotomous city, and what's happening along the Strip isn't necessarily what's happening where we live. The one exception, public-art wise, might be McCarran International Airport, which is a true common ground for residents and tourists. Amid all its obligatory Vegas flash, the airport has long programmed an array of relatively high-caliber art

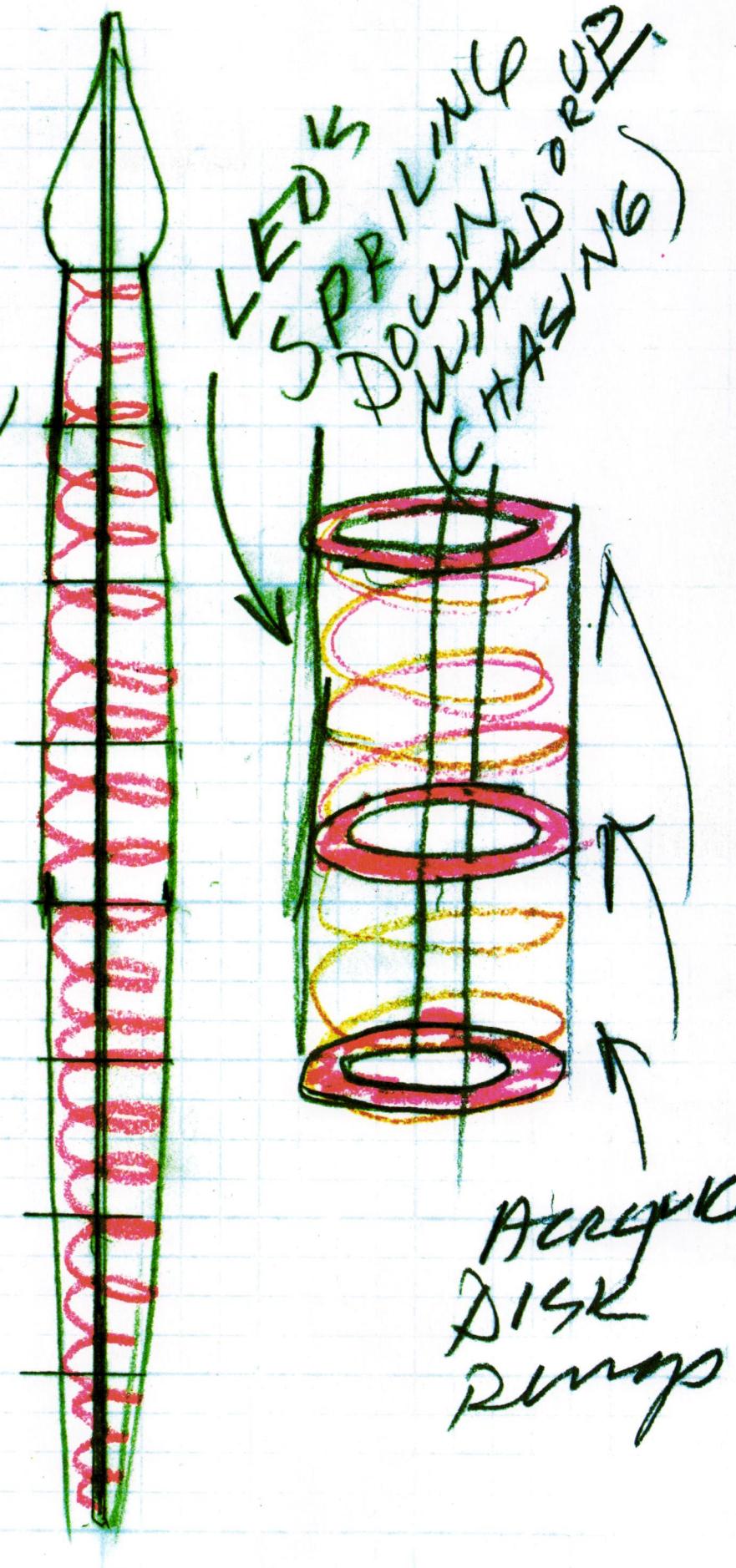
that probes our culture—such as the heroic “Vaquero” by the late great Texas sculptor Luis Jimenez and the majestic bighorn mural by former Las Vegan Robert Beckmann.

Still, where public art seems to count is closer to home. There have been several important efforts around the community (see Page 47), from “Flashlight,” by noted sculptor Claes Oldenburg, to Zap!, Clark County's utility-box art program. Downtown's “Monument to the Simulacrum,” by local artist Stephen Hendee, was even recognized by *Art in America* magazine as one of the nation's top 20 public-art projects completed in 2007.

So we're certainly not a sterile and lifeless place. However, we're still waiting for the major public art that gets its arms around our essence. That's a lofty goal, sure, but it happens in other major cities, and it will happen here. The question is when. When will our art do the talking so we can move on to normal city-dweller pursuits, such as sitting on a bench in the shade and wondering if that new multi-ton tangle of bronze at Symphony Park was worth so many taxpayer dollars.

It may be sooner rather than later. Amid an economic storm that sank our art museum, no one is handing out sunny forecasts, but there are several public-art projects vying to be real image-shapers. Here's a quick tour of the future:

A LITTLE
LIKE THE
LADD
piece 1



New York artist
Dennis Oppenheim's
sketch for the
Las Vegas Art District
gateway project.



Artists riffed on an old Vegas icon—the Stardust—for the Casino Center sidewalk project.

Order and Chaos

Wes Myles interrupts a recap of Mayor Goodman's public-art statement not long after the first sentence. "Those are *our* words," he says with a laugh over the lunchtime clatter in Tinoco's Bistro, inside his Arts Factory downtown. "The mayor is professing our dream ... about why we've got to do this." He grins and quickly adds, "But that's OK, because he has a bigger voice to the world."

The "dream" is the Boulder Plaza Sculpture Park that, come 2010, will run along Boulder Avenue, the short street behind the Arts Factory. Myles, a member of the park foundation's executive committee and a full-blooded Arts District pioneer, is confident that the sculpture park merits a Goodman-size voice. "It'll give the Arts District a sense of place not just here but in the world," he says. "There's nothing like it—it's that unique. It'll put us on the map in a way that we've never been."

The reason, like the park itself, revolves around Israeli sculptor Yaacov Agam, the "father of kinetic art." Asked to capture the light and energy of Las Vegas, he came up with a design for "Order and Chaos," a forest of 35 hexagonal glass columns—each 18 feet high and illuminated. When it's installed at the west end of Boulder Avenue (near Main Street), visitors will walk among the columns and contemplate their meaning through experiencing visual (and possibly musical) harmony and discord.

Chris Attanasio, a local landscape architect who worked on the setting with the Poggemeyer Design Group, knows the \$30,000 scale model well (it's on display next door to The Arts Factory at S2 Art, which is run by board member Jack Solomon) and has visited with the artist. The sculpture's meaning is "appropriate these days," he says. "You can be moving through an experience and not understand it, and by taking side steps it comes into order."

Attanasio's task was to create "a nice foundation for the sculpture to show off," without detracting from it. So while the Agam sits at one end, the majority of the park, including a plaza that will eventually feature smaller works, spreads two blocks to the east past The Arts Factory and then flows perpendicularly to the north, down First Street. "It'll be pretty dynamic," Attanasio says. "It's about being within the sculpture and seeing all the facets line up into images, but also how people see it from a distance."

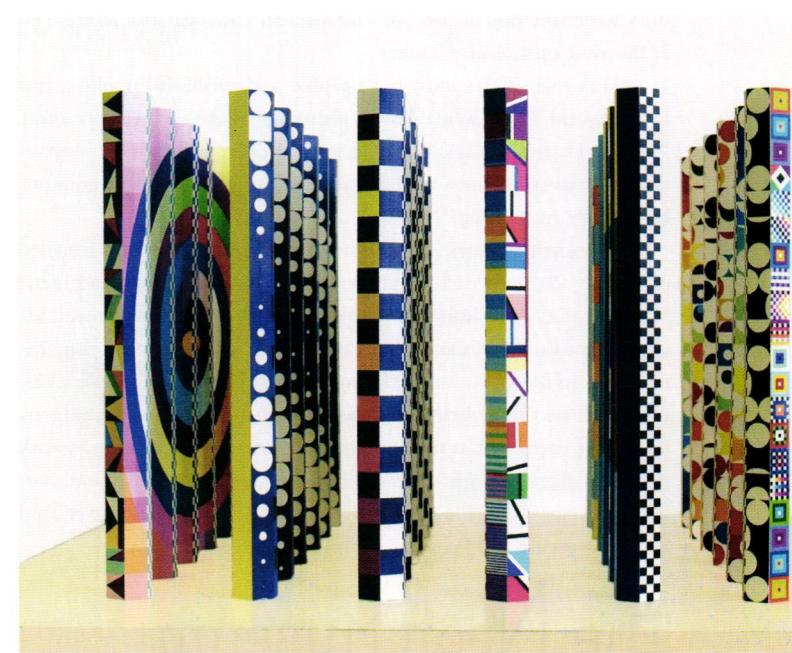
Myles compares the overall experience to Oldenburg's "Spoonbridge and Cherry" at the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden. "It is cool because of the size," he says. "You can be 300 yards away and enjoy it. The Agam will be world-class, city-scale art that doesn't exist here."

Now if the foundation can just make the park happen. It's been five years and, despite being on the same public-arts page as City Hall, they're still going back and forth with city attorneys over contract details. The City Council has approved the project, however, and has supported it with \$80,000 in funding. The foundation still needs nearly \$4 million for the park itself, which doesn't include future sculpture commissions. But Myles is hopeful that it will all

happen, including the park's prize. "If we get the Agam," he says, "it will be the object that changes the environment we live in."

Gateways to the Arts

Mayor Goodman received the 2008 Public Leadership in the Arts Award from the U.S. Conference of Mayors for good reason. The Las Vegas Arts District—also known as 18b—has sparked redevelopment life downtown, and the Percent for the Arts ordinance enables Las Vegas to do what many big cities do: force the funding of public art through the capital construction budget. ▶▶▶



Early renderings of Yaacov Agam's "Order and Chaos" sculpture.



Two of the latest examples are in the Arts District. The first is the Casino Center Boulevard project, which, in addition to widened sidewalks, new streetlights and landscaping improvements, features artistic enhancements that, according to the Las Vegas Arts Commission's mission statement, "reflect the history and iconography of Las Vegas." A group of graduates from UNLV's master of fine arts program inlaid designs in the benches and sidewalks that riff on the old Stardust's iconic starbursts. Upon completion, the stretch of boulevard from Charleston to California (which runs by the east end of the Sculpture Park) will be renamed Arts Way.

To ensure the Arts District's sense of place, the city commissioned New York artist Dennis Oppenheim to design a pair of "Gateways" on Charleston, one at the east entrance on Las Vegas Boulevard, and at the west on Casino Center.

"He's one of the most high-profile and successful public artists in the world," says Joshua Abbey, chairman of the Arts Commission. "Everybody felt that because of the scale of this project it was important to have confidence in the selection, that the artist was going to be globally recognized."

Oppenheim's work will be no small statement when installed in January 2010. At each Gateway, two 40-foot-tall galvanized metal "paintbrushes" will lean over the street, with LED lights surrounding the brush handles and each tip beaming a rainbow of color that intersects in the air to form "the world's first light arch." This last element will be Oppenheim's obligatory nod to our city's defining art form. "He expressed, as many others did, that creating public artwork in a place like Las Vegas is exceedingly difficult to do because it's not a normal city," Abbey says. "It has all of these connotations to it. And Las Vegas itself is public art as a city; it's a visual spectacle."

The Neon Museum

Restoring some of Las Vegas' most treasured neon signs and posting them along Fremont Street was a natural idea for a public-art project. While the 10 installed thus far have been a hit, the non-profit Neon Museum, whose founding board includes architect and first sign donor Brad Friedmutter, AIA, has much more in store—literally (there are 100 signs in the collection) and figuratively.

The prospect of the completed project—the bulk of which will be at the neon-sign boneyard on Las Vegas Boulevard near Cashman Field—was so exciting that Friedmutter used it to lure senior

designer Suzanne Couture from New York City three years ago. "It was one of the carrots dangled for me," she says. "He said, 'So, you're kind of into the cool old Vegasy stuff. If you came to work for me, you could work on this project.'"

She has been intimately involved with the Neon Museum ever since—in fact, she got married in the boneyard. What continues to fuel her passion are the project's intricacies, which will begin unfolding later this year with the reopening of the historic La Concha lobby. The half-century-old structure, designed by Paul Revere Williams, was moved from its original site along the Strip a few years ago in order to become the museum's visitor center and centerpiece.

After you walk through La Concha, the next layer of experience will be the "new" boneyard. Instead of a neatly structured array of signs propped up on posts, like along Fremont, the museum board hired artist Christopher Reitmaier to come up with a "collage" that organizes the signs in a way that tells their story (you'll be able to walk down "Motel Avenue," for example) while preserving the chaotic, after-life beauty of the boneyard (by leaving certain signs lying around in various states of disrepair).

"What happened was everybody came to the realization that what people love about the boneyard is the boneyard," Couture says. "It's not a pristine place where there's a roof and set lighting. People like the atmosphere of these oversized items sitting out in their natural landscape."

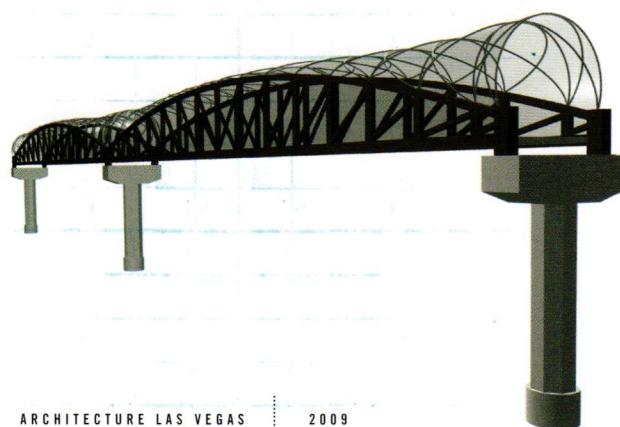
Eventually, a dozen more vintage signs will dot Las Vegas Boulevard, showing the way from Fremont Street to the boneyard. And come summer 2010, the adjacent Neon Park will complete the public-art experience. Its sign will be inspired by the classic fonts found in the boneyard collection, but this one will be all new (and energy-efficient).

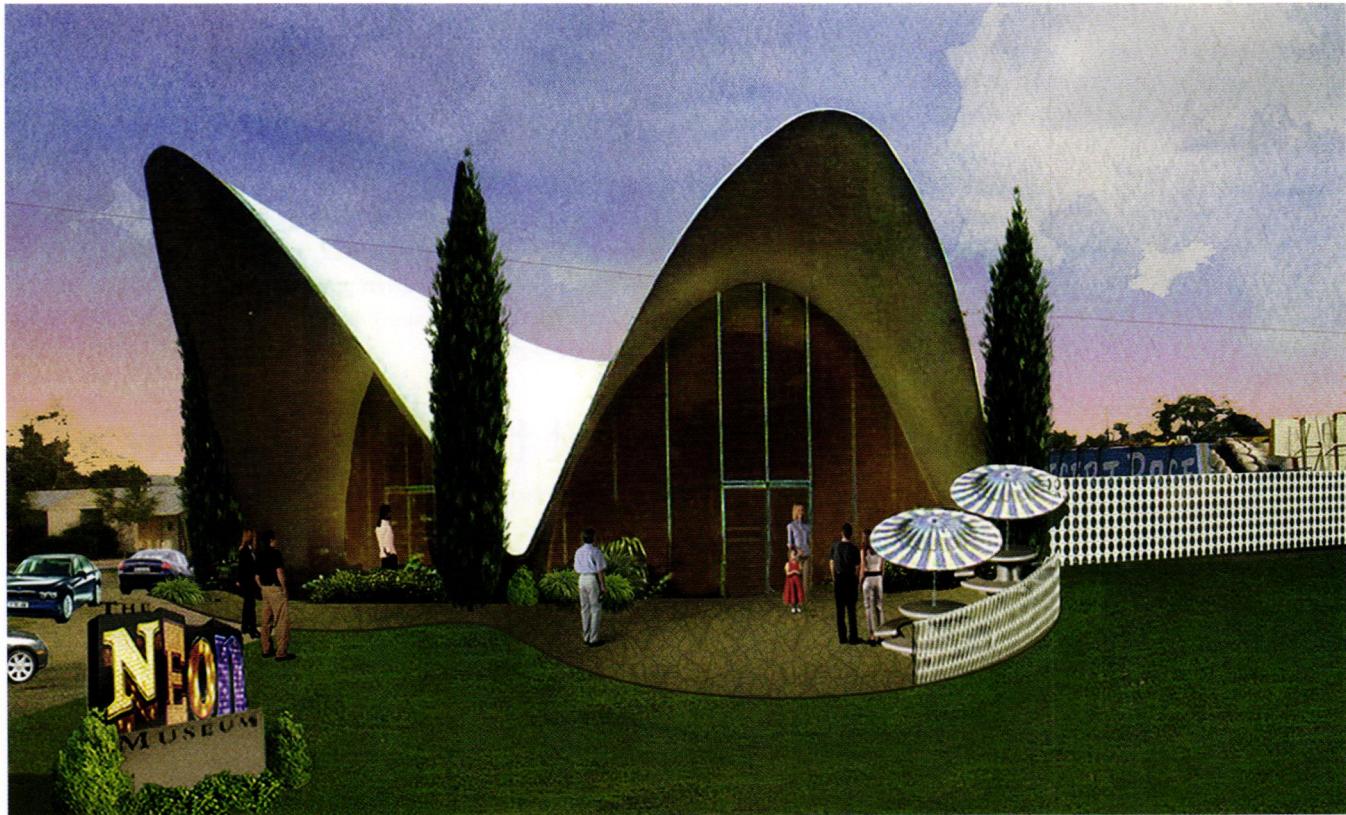
In the end, Neon Museum board member Bill Marion says, the idea adds up to a "one-of-a-kind public-art project ... celebrating the special relationship that Las Vegas has with the development of neon as an art form. While other cities incorporate neon, Las Vegas totally embraced it, and our neon sign companies were the leading innovators in their day. Even the small signs outside motels were well-crafted signs."

What's more, the Neon Museum might just be the quintessential public-art project for a city often stuck culturally between catering to tourists and pleasing residents. "You don't need to know the history of a sign to appreciate the art form," Marion says, "but once you do know it, it makes it that much more enriching."

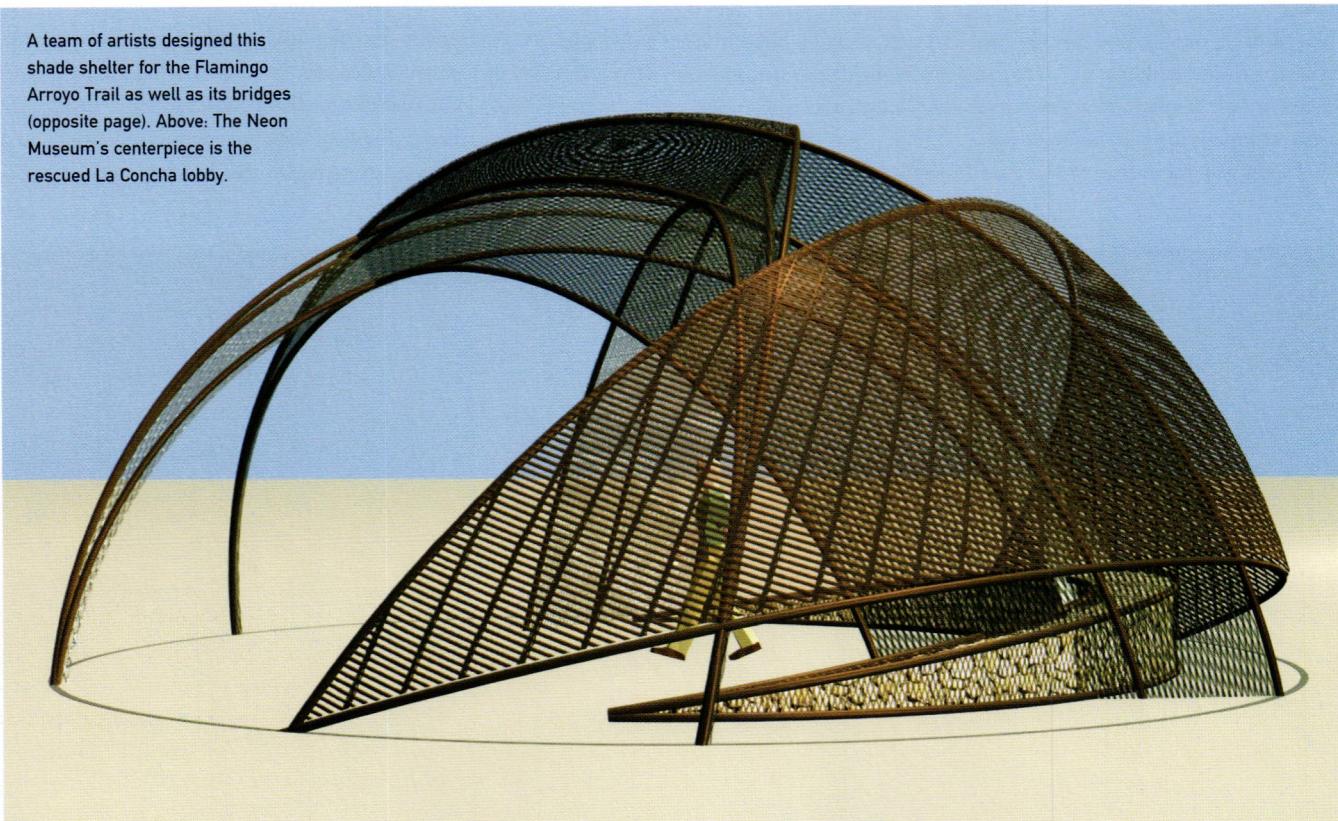
The Flamingo Arroyo

Pat Gaffey has lived in Las Vegas for the better part of a half-century, and as one of public art's most venerable advocates, he's quite familiar with the old local attitude: *We don't have much public art and we've gotten along fine without it.* "My hope," says Clark County's cultural program supervisor, "is that starts to change when we have art, when people are around it."





A team of artists designed this shade shelter for the Flamingo Arroyo Trail as well as its bridges (opposite page). Above: The Neon Museum's centerpiece is the rescued La Concha lobby.



He believes the artist-designed elements for the county's \$14 million Flamingo Arroyo Trail project, funded by the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act, could be a big litmus test for that theory.

As part of their master plan for the project, called "The Living Arroyo: A Civic Spine," artists Buster Simpson of Seattle, Kevin Berry of Phoenix and Barbara Grygutis of Tucson dreamed up gateway arches, kiosks, benches, shade shelters and bridge enhancements for the 11-mile trail, which will run from the trailhead at McLeod and Flamingo to Wetlands Park. All of these architectural elements will double as public art to—according to the mission statement—"create a sense of place" and promote "an acute awareness of the surrounding desert environment."

The shelters, for example, are half-dome structures of bent pipes and woven metal mesh that will rust over time. "We were trying to do something special, that felt inviting and timeless," Simpson says. "The initial spark was based on aboriginal structures of the desert, where they would simply bend saplings of bushes and tie them together and drape woven mats or blankets over them for shade."

Six pedestrian bridges are planned for the trail, including three designed by the artists in conjunction with engineers at G.C. Wallace. Though rising costs have raised some doubt about the fate of the art-enhanced bridges, Gaffey believes that not only will they be built as designed, they will become "the most visible public art we have in the valley."

The artists originally designed the bridges so that each would be distinctive in appearance, so that people driving by them can mentally "connect the dots" as the Arroyo project develops (2010 expects to be the big year for progress) and eventually be lured from their cars to the multiuse trail. For example, the bridge over Boulder Highway will feature a series of curved steel hoops and woven wire mesh wrapping the rust-colored truss.

"They're rather reserved compared to what's going there in Las

Vegas, with everything hitting you over the head," Simpson says with a laugh. "If this is hitting you over the head, it's through its reserved attention to detail. It rewards those who are taking notice rather than those who are being fed. The ideal thing is that it's something that grows on you, that you keep coming back and notice something different each time."

After all these years, Gaffey is willing to wait for a little art appreciation. "I hope this project whets the public's appetite for more. This is what I have been praying for—to show that public art can transform the community and to get the people to say, 'Yes, this is what we want.'"

Just the Beginning

"One other very important point regarding this public-art project is the process," Simpson adds, "the integration of artists on a infrastructure project early on, to integrate art into the utility—often at no additional cost. Collaboration with artists is not practiced that much around the country, including in Las Vegas, so hopefully this project will open up the thinking of the county, that there are professional artists out there who serve to give place meaning."

This is shaping up to be a trend, with the recent examples ranging from the artist-designed columns inside Centennial Hills Library to the new playground at Wetlands Park, which features large desert animal sculptures by Miguel Rodriguez.

Meantime, many other projects involving artists are either underway, being contemplated or awaiting funding. The county, for example, could someday incorporate public art "to help to bring the past alive" at the new Old Spanish Trail Park on West Sahara Avenue, Gaffey says. His Zap! program recently finished phase two, with local artists hired to paint utility boxes along streets in the Paradise area, and he hopes



to continue it in other neighborhoods. And McCarran International Airport will continue to spur the public-art charge with a \$5 million investment in five pieces for Terminal 3 (including a work by Massachusetts artist Stuart Schechter that incorporates 3,000 resin butterflies into the shape of an airplane), which is set to open in 2012.

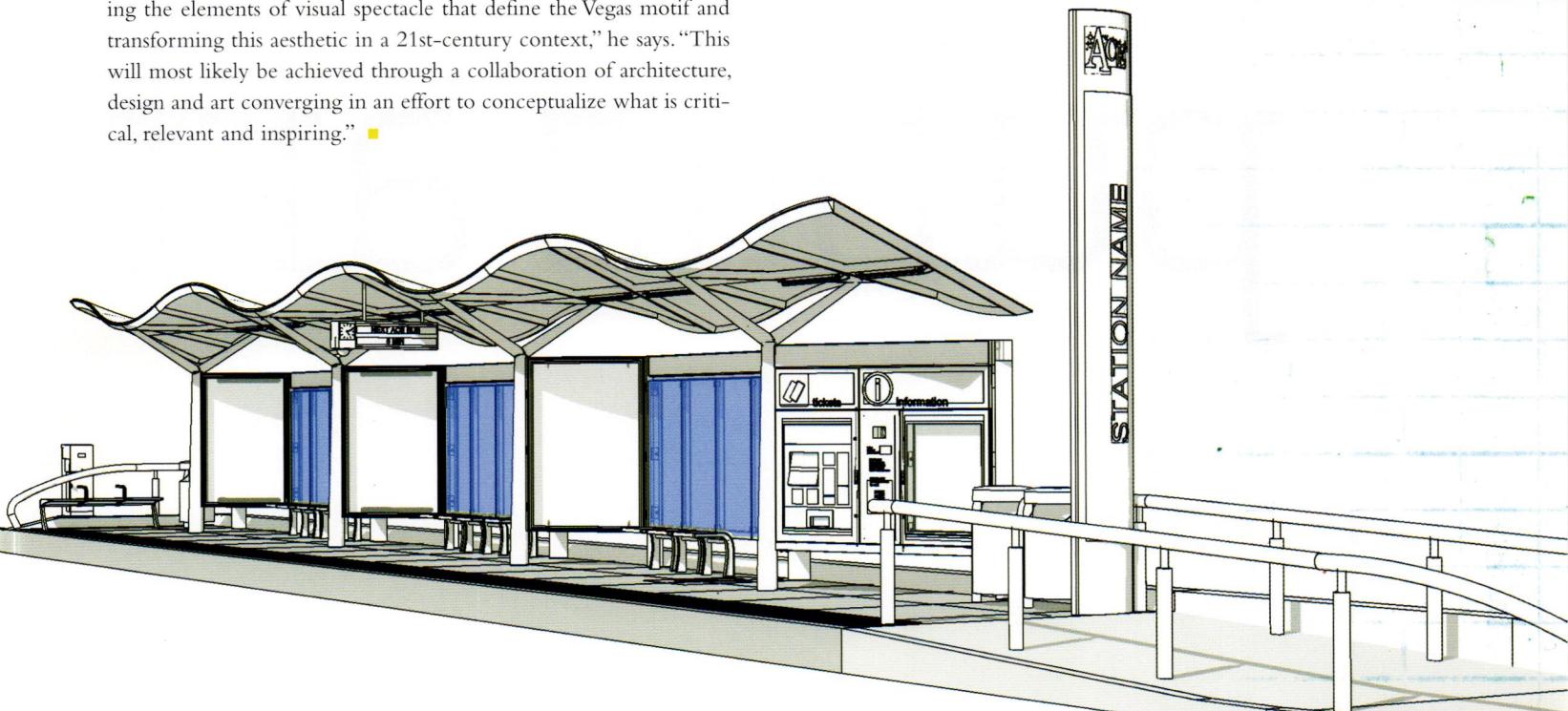
In Las Vegas, the Arts Commission hired Denver artist David Griggs to "art up" a bridge, too; this one over Las Vegas Boulevard near the Neon Museum, as part of the city's urban trails program. The Fifth Street School Plaza, where the "Simulacrum" stands, may eventually be converted from a generic afterthought with concrete benches into what Vicki Scuri, a public-art specialist from Washington state, sees as an "urban setting with great potential," a community gathering spot that creates "an emotional connection with place." For the Regional Transportation Commission's Stop & Glow program, eight local artists created "imagery-evoking ideas about Las Vegas history and iconography" within the framework of the new ACE rapid transit system shelters. (You can see renderings of these projects at www.lvartscommission.com.)

There will undoubtedly be major public-art projects unveiled as the city matures, starting with the ultimate blank canvas, Union Park—61 acres of master-planned urban landscape on old railroad land. As Joshua Abbey says, all of these are opportunities for Las Vegas to not only have public art but also to redefine it, thanks in part to the fact that we are "unencumbered by history."

"In emulating the template of great cities that utilize public edification of art to signify their cultural heritage and identity, Las Vegas has an opportunity to innovate rather than imitate by appropriating the elements of visual spectacle that define the Vegas motif and transforming this aesthetic in a 21st-century context," he says. "This will most likely be achieved through a collaboration of architecture, design and art converging in an effort to conceptualize what is critical, relevant and inspiring." ■

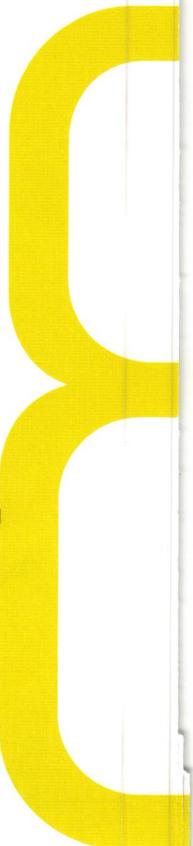


Designs by local artists Stephen Hendea (top) and Brian Porray (above) for the new ACE "Stop & Glow" shelters (below).



Opposite page: David Griggs' Cultural Corridor bridge.

public art



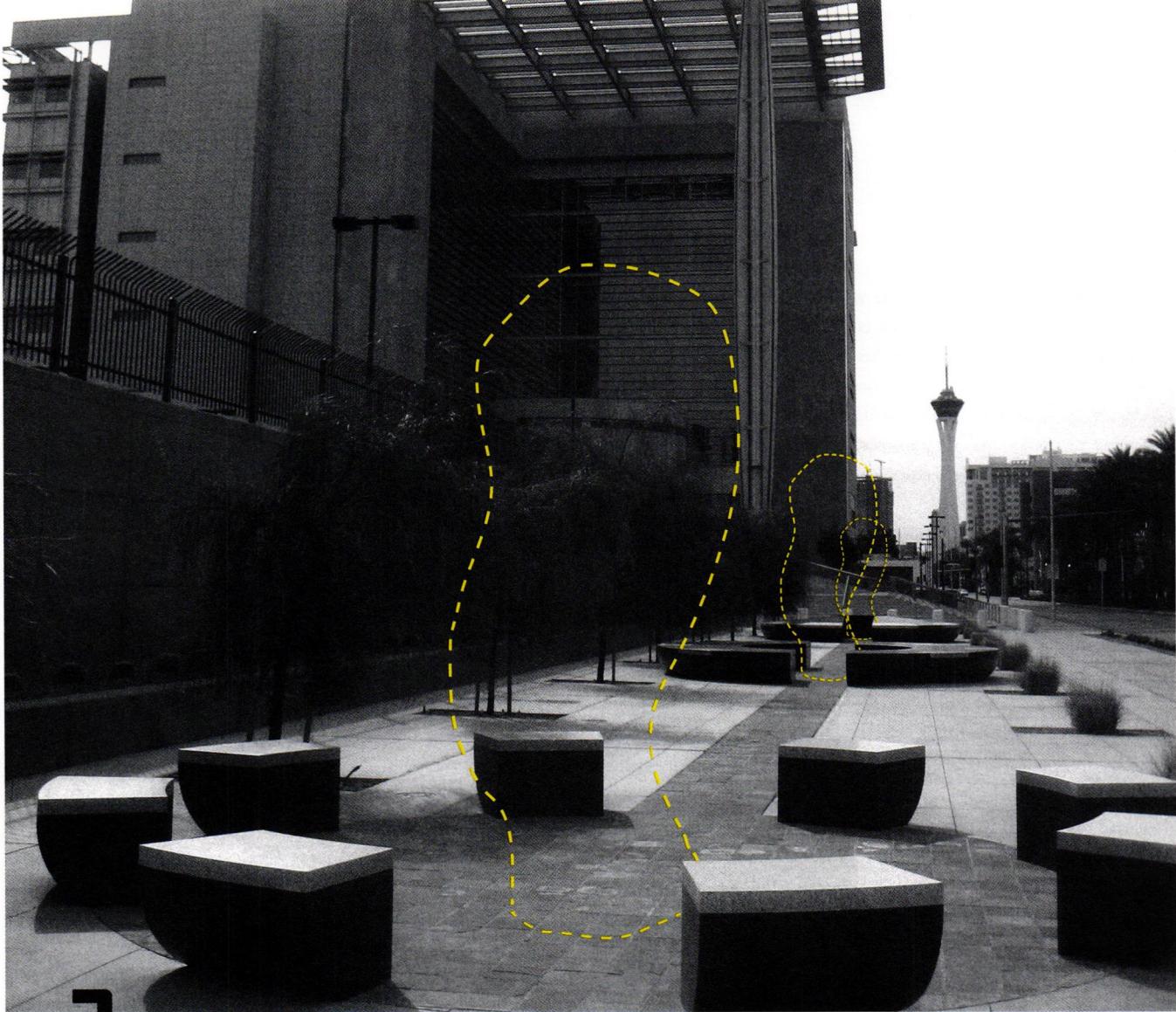


PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY DEBRA HEISER

democracy

DON'T BOTHER COMMISSIONING
A WORK THAT EVERYONE MIGHT LIKE.
BESIDES BEING IMPOSSIBLE,
IT MISSES THE WHOLE POINT.

BY DAVID PAGEL

No artist knows how a piece he's working on will turn out, much less whether it will find a buyer, get good press, make its way into a museum, be embraced by art viewers or someday enter into popular consciousness by becoming an essential part of public discourse—an icon that is familiar to folks from various walks of life and whose meaning is important to them, precisely because it is open to all sorts of interpretations.

In the past, this process took years, often decades. Works of art began their lives in the shelter of a studio, where artists enjoyed the freedom to do pretty much whatever they wanted, without having to answer to anyone. It was a whole other process for works to gain public recognition and become signature emblems of particular times and places. Diverse groups and individuals who have made art a large ►►

“Fighting over” is not the same as “fighting for.”

part of their lives would separate the wheat from the chaff through slow, homegrown consensus.

Today, everything moves faster. Art is expected to do its thing in an instant. Committees are called on to determine which works will be around in the future, and they get started before the art they support even exists, shepherding mere ideas from the privacy of the studio to the visibility of public plazas, where they become centerpieces of social life—or sorry emblems of the disconnect between public officials and the citizens they supposedly serve. This runs counter to the way art functions in a democracy.

More often than not, these well-meaning committees, made up of experts, bureaucrats and politicians, as well as artists and ordinary citizens, oversee an excessively bureaucratized set of procedures as they strive to keep the art on message, to avoid controversy and to ensure that no one—or no one with power—is offended. Their task is expensive, time-consuming and thankless. It's also impossible, because there is no way to know what the public will make of a work once it enters their city. Although individual artists can be cajoled, strong-armed and bought off—especially second-rate ones or those desperate for income—the viewing public is not so easily placated, ameliorated or controlled. When it comes to art, everyone's a critic. And while that may be a nightmare for the do-gooders on civic committees, it's what makes art meaningful and worth fighting over in modern societies that pride themselves on being civilized.

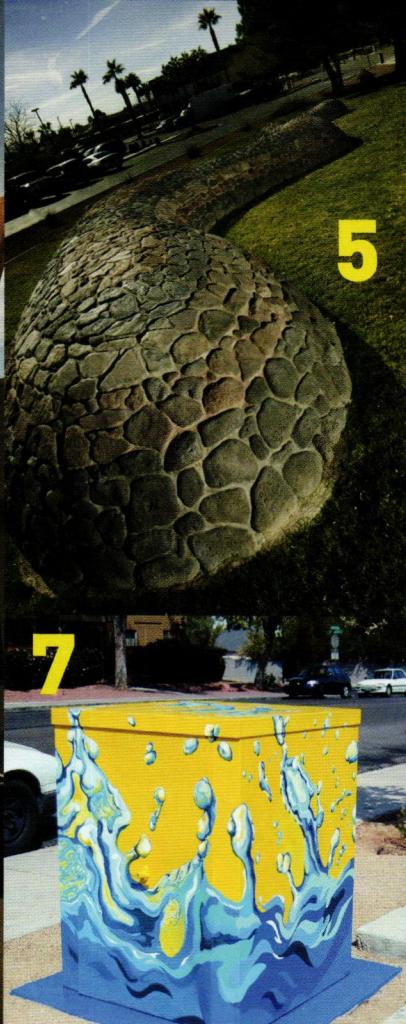
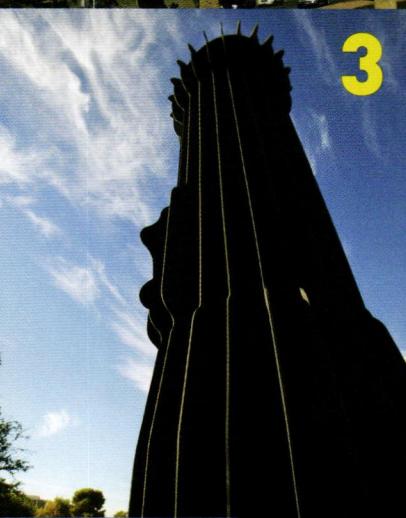
“Fighting over” is not the same as “fighting for.” The first presumes that art is a part of modern life, that some art is good and that some isn't. These simple facts are ignored by most public arts officials, who behave as if art is not really a part of everyday life and must be inserted into it, bestowed upon the lowly by those with the power and noblesse oblige to do so. They believe that all art is good, that it is good for you, and that it must be fought for. It isn't. Some art is terrific and some stinks, and arguments about which is which—made by anyone interested—determine the meaning and social value of the work.

Committees can neither predict nor determine these things. The best they can do is to seek works that invite and facilitate open-ended interactions with as broad a swath of the general public as possible. This does not mean that sophisticated art must be dumbed down. It simply means that those folks charged with bringing art to the public not get in the way of the public's unpredictable response to it by treating all of the administrative work that went into the selection process as anything more than a small first step in the art's path to becoming truly public.

The pieces that are selected, commissioned and installed must convince enough people who see them that they have not been foisted on the byways and plazas of their fair cities by officials with their own agendas or by citizens with their own selfish interests. In the best case, locals embrace public works as their own, as objects in which they see themselves, their desires, their communities, their dreams and ideals represented concretely, metaphorically, poetically. Such pieces capture people's feelings about their place in the present, giving form to inchoate notions about what it means to be an individual in the increasingly global world of instantaneous digital communication.

This is what happened when Anish Kapoor's abstract sculpture was installed four years ago in Chicago's Millennium Park. Affectionately dubbed “The Bean” by the general public, the blob-shaped sculpture's undulating stainless-steel surface is polished so brightly that it catches your reflection—not to mention the city skyline, the park around you and the shore of Lake Michigan—in an outdoor, industrial-strength, fun-house mirror. It's fun to walk around and under Kapoor's sculpture, to see your body take all sorts of shapes as you weave your way through a crowd of strangers—all doing exactly what you are doing, only differently. With playful grace, Kapoor's sculpture shows that unpredictable things happen when individuals begin to form groups. It makes physical the fact that one's identity changes—and is changed by—the group one becomes a part of. It also demonstrates that what you were when you entered into the shifting terrain of public space is transformed by the experience of being included in something bigger, maybe better, surely stranger, and certainly more exciting.

As a work of public art, Kapoor's piece succeeds because it is free-form and open-ended, because it alters perception, and because it puts a high priority on people's interactions with it. In a sense, it makes a place in the present for the long, drawn-out consensus-building on which all art is predicated, especially art that lasts in a democracy. So even though Kapoor's piece came into existence by the same un-public, committee-approved processes that spawn so much inert and enervating public art, it still invites each and every individual who sees it into a situation that is indeterminate and thrilling. It sets itself up as an occasion for experiences citizens can't help but discuss because they are as familiar as looking in the bathroom mirror and as disorienting as living in the digital world, where the pace of life may be faster than ever, yet there is still no substitute for experiencing things for oneself. ■



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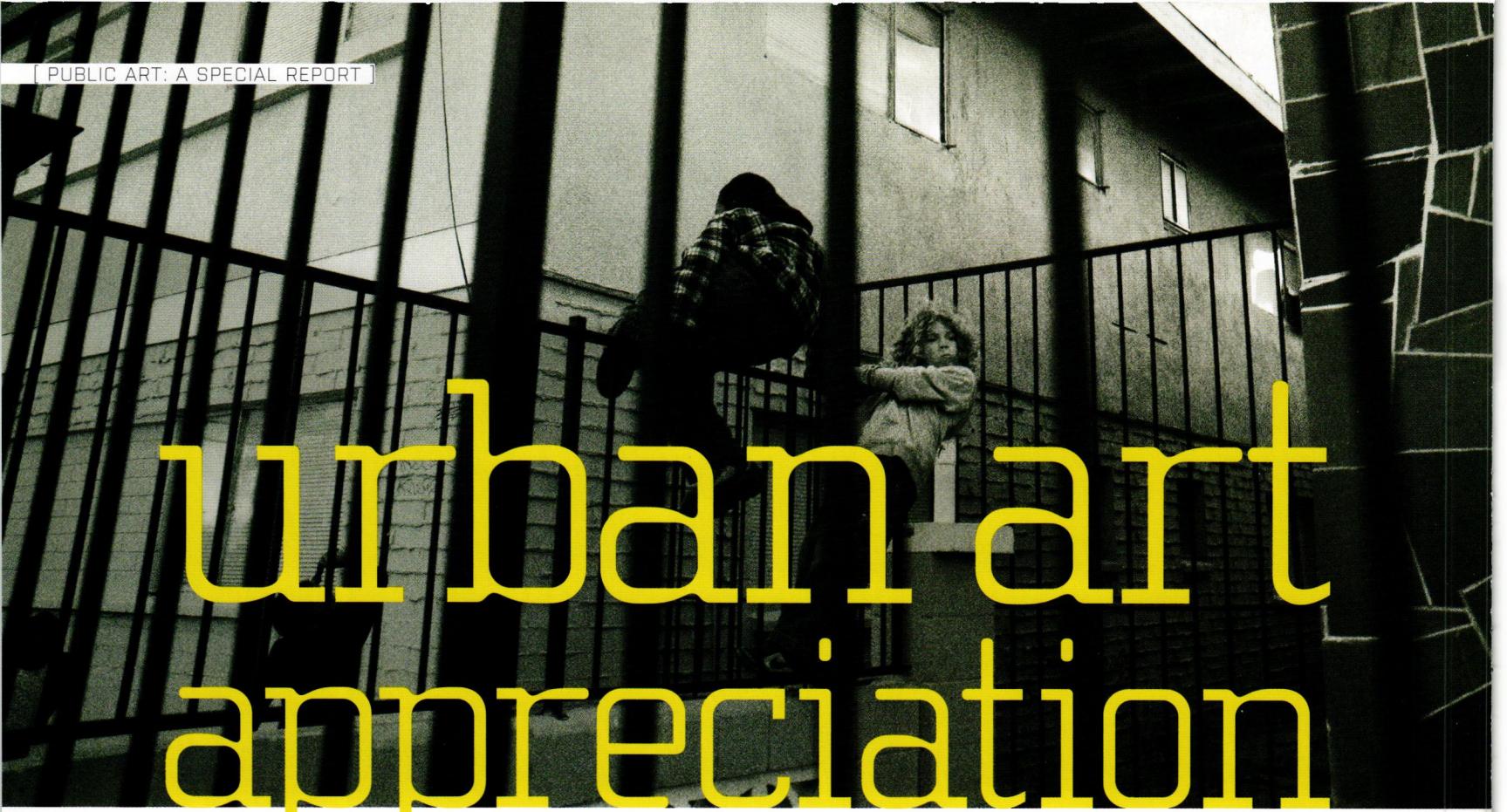
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PHOTO 3 COURTESY OF UNLV PHOTO SERVICES

The Vegas Art Sampler

Seven classic public works in the valley

By Phil Hagen

1. **The Fabulous Las Vegas sign.** In many ways, it is our ultimate piece of public art. Located at the gateway to the Strip, this googie masterpiece, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, is iconic and treasured by locals and tourists alike. No other city offers a welcome like this—especially one that's been relevant through so many Strip generations.
2. **The collection at McCarran International Airport's Terminal D.** This most public of our spaces is a steady contributor to the broadening of the city's cultural identity. Highlights include David Phelps' climbable desert animal sculptures that rise out of the rotunda floor, and Luis Jimenez's "Vaquero," a fiberglass rendition of a fired-up Mexican cowboy on a bucking horse.
3. **"Flashlight" at the UNLV Performing Arts Center plaza.** This 1981 iron sculpture is Claes Oldenburg's 35-foot take on an usher's wayfinding device, which he has flipped upside down and switched "on" (at night) to mark the spot for the arts.
4. **"Spirit Tower" at the Summerlin Library and Performing Arts Center.** The 10-ton, 20-foot-tall steel sculpture was Summerlin's first piece of public art (1993), done by internationally known artist Rita Deanin Abbey, who lives in the area.
5. **"Serpent Mound" at the Green Valley Library.** Lloyd Hamrol's 1988 concrete-and-stone sculpture—neatly formed in geologic-like layers—snakes through the grass as a reminder of what came before us, and it serves as an informal playground for little library creatures now.
6. **"The Winged Figures of the Republic" at Hoover Dam.** With all due respect to the Benny Binion statue outside the Horseshoe, these twin 30-foot-tall art deco bronze beauties from 1937 are Southern Nevada's best monument to human accomplishment.
7. **Zap! in Winchester.** This 2005 Clark County program was an inspiring, low-cost effort—whimsically executed by local artists—to beautify the most utilitarian of objects (utility boxes) and create a bit of identity for the old neighborhood.



urban art appreciation

One couple's outdoor gallery effort inspires brighter days for a blighted neighborhood

BY REBECCA ZISCH

A few years ago, Camille and Jerry Duskin had grown tired of hearing fellow property owners in the Gateway District complain about graffiti. Camille believed that the city was doing an admirable job of responding to the problem in the notorious neighborhood around the Stratosphere—long known as “Naked City”—but by “merely painting over the graffiti,” she says, “they were just providing more space for tagging.”

It occurred to the Duskins that instead of leaving blank canvases for taggers, they should try covering street-facing walls with murals. Maybe even vandals would respect art in their own community. Camille didn’t waste any time in testing the theory: “We used our own building as the example of what we could do for the neighborhood.”

For that first project, in 2006, the Duskins hired local artist Greg Etchison, who painted a scene depicting a museum of masterworks—complete with arts patrons—on the wall of the Fairfield Avenue apartment building they have owned for 16 years. The Duskins paid for the entire project out of their own pockets, and afterward they were encouraged enough to form a nonprofit organization to further what the sign above the mural announced: “Gateway Gallery—A Public Art Collection.”

Today the Gateway Gallery includes five murals and two “alley art” pieces (paintings on the backside of buildings) done

by a reformed graffiti tagger and youths from the nearby Stupak Community Center. One more project is in the works. The paint was donated by Sherwin-Williams, and the organization received two consecutive annual grants from the City of Las Vegas Neighborhood Partners Fund, which supports projects aimed at improving the livability of urban neighborhoods.

It was at one of those grant workshops that Lance Kirk, Associate AIA, first heard about the Gateway Gallery. “I thought, what a cool way of improving the community and therefore improving quality of life for the people who live there,” says the project leader of the Lucchesi Galati architecture firm. “I was amazed at how art can turn bland concrete buildings in a blighted neighborhood into more vibrant and cultural communities. Those murals are doing much more for the community than the architecture is.”

As a resident of the nearby Huntridge neighborhood, he was also “struck by the project from a community improvement perspective. When I saw a woman going out of her way to make a difference, it really made an impact on me.”

+

As Camille drives through the Gateway District, she suddenly taps her side window and sighs, “We’d love to get all of these buildings done, but it’s hard to get all of the property owners on board. ... Do you know the only way we know who to contact about



PHOTOS BY RYAN REASON, STUDIO WEST PHOTOGRAPHY

painting a mural is by approaching residents and asking them who they send their rent to?"

The art side isn't easy, either, because many of the walls are old and full of cracks. But after hours of manual labor by Jerry Duskin, a retired general contractor, the walls of the rundown, gray stucco buildings are transformed into fresh canvases.

All of this dedication goes beyond helping property values in the Gateway. The Duskins, whose own residence is in suburban Peccole Ranch, believe "it is a personal responsibility" for people to be involved in the beautification of the communities in which they live and work. Camille smiles warmly and adds: "We've never worked this hard in business, and for this we're volunteers."

Despite being leaders of the project—as well as avid art collectors during their 25-year marriage—they don't impose their own ideas of beautification on the community or deign to tell an artist what to paint. Actually, the process has affected them as much as they've affected it. "Working on this," Camille says, "has really been an education for me, especially meeting some of the graffiti artists and learning about it as an emerging art form." In fact, they have purchased an original piece from every artist who has contributed to the Gateway Gallery.

One of those artists is David Ozuna, whose murals adorn several walls in Las Vegas, including a couple at Bellagio and the

Venetian. He was working on a project near Camille's home, near Sahara Avenue and Fort Apache Road, when she spotted him and struck up a conversation. Her charm and passion for the Gateway had an immediate effect, and soon he was doing a mural along Fairfield Avenue depicting native plants and wildlife. "It's so enjoyable to work on my own projects and ideas while also contributing to the quality of someone else's life," he says. "It's inspiring—and Camille's inspiring—to me."

And potentially inspiring for everyone who lives and works in Naked City. "I want to bring an awareness of the art field itself," Ozuna says. "In the poorer neighborhoods they don't get to go to museums or experience much outside the neighborhood at all, so this is a way to bring art to them and maybe even inspire some of them creatively."

Thanks to that very first mural—the gallery within the Gallery that depicts several masterworks—the children at the Stupak Community Center now know what a Monet, Van Gogh and Degas look like, Camille says. "They're learning to appreciate the art, I think, and the neighborhood seems to appreciate that, too."

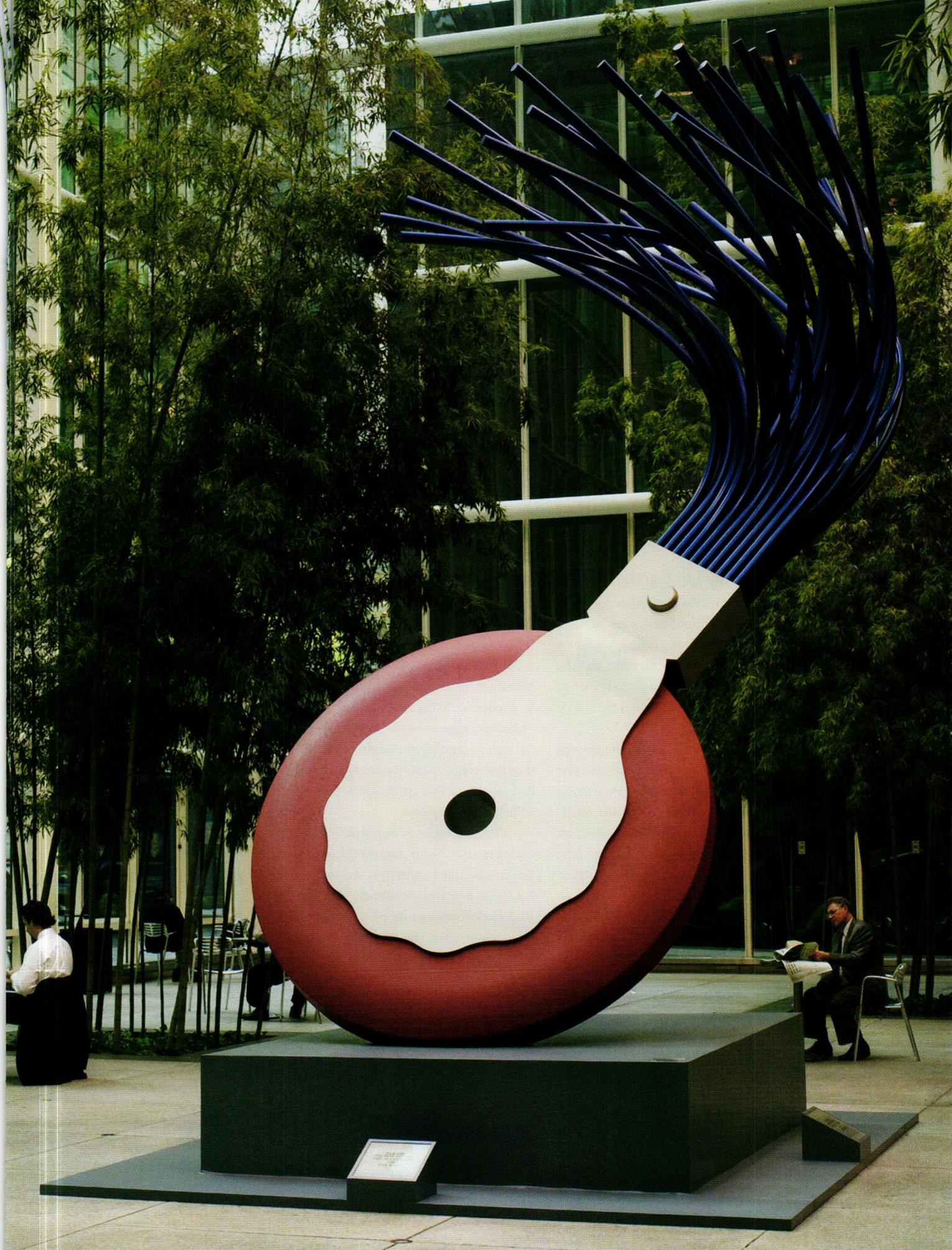
For one thing, the Gateway District sure looks better. And, second, there's a good chance it may stay that way. Camille is proud to point out that not a single completed mural has been tagged since the Gateway Gallery began. ■

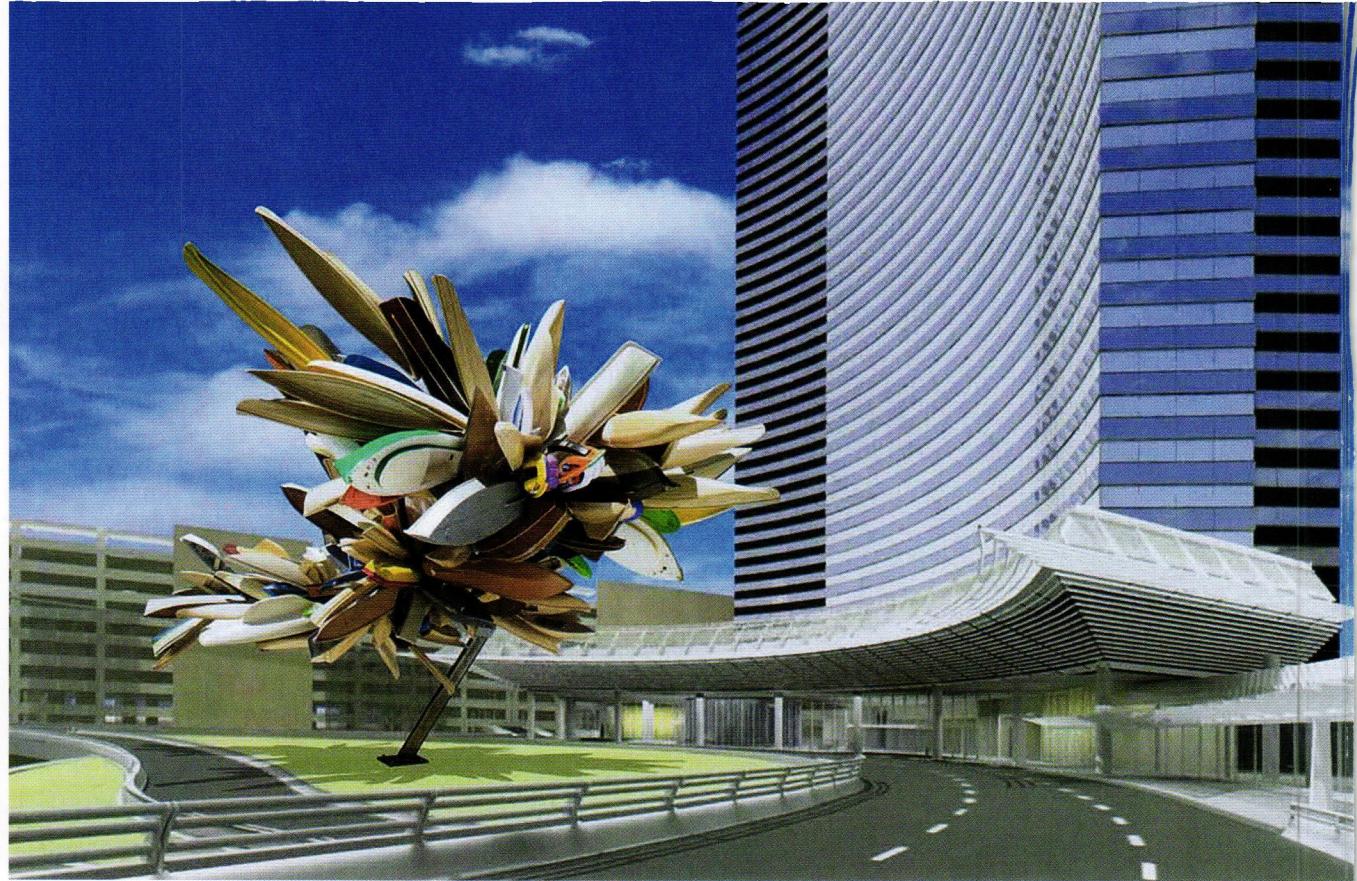
A MONT UMEN TAT Collection

With CityCenter's unveiling comes a whole new public-art dynamic—even if it's private

BY WILLIAM L. FOX

Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen's 19-foot-tall stainless-steel and fiberglass "Typewriter Eraser, Scale X" was temporarily stationed in Manhattan. The "artist proof" version of the sculpture will permanently reside at CityCenter.





R

obert Hughes had it less than half right 18 years ago when, standing on a corner of the Las Vegas Strip, he famously declared on public television that an art museum in the city could never compete with the neon plumage of the casinos. The show was *The Shock of the New*, and the art critic for *Time* magazine should have taken one of his own ideas to heart—the notion that art thrives by constantly reinventing itself.

Architecture is an art, as Las Vegas reminded us by reinventing itself right out from underneath the feet of the Australian ex-pat, who was then the most popular art critic in the world. The signs on the Strip were soon replaced by the buildings themselves as the street pulled itself inside out. The parking lots were relocated from the front of their properties to the back, and the buildings moved up to the sidewalk to stake their identities for their corporate owners.

Art spaces have tried to compete with the Strip's visual culture. Steve Wynn put a gallery of greatest hits in Bellagio in 1998, and it remains a halfway step toward resolving the tension between the ideas. But a decent museum branch on the main drag, the Guggenheim, was unable to lure much of an audience, and its exhibit spaces are now closed.

So how will a collection of art fare with architecture on the Strip? We're about to find out when the \$40 million fine-art program at CityCenter opens by year's end. The joint venture between MGM Mirage and a subsidiary of Dubai World is another paradigm-shifting iteration of the Strip, one that focuses on creating a world-class urban space from scratch. Its planners rejected the premise that simulacra of

the world's greatest cities would be endlessly fascinating. Instead of copying old architecture, world-renowned architects were commissioned to invent new forms. And art was integrated into the project from the beginning, rather than added as an afterthought.

Hiring Norman Foster, Cesar Pelli, Rafael Viñoly and Daniel Libeskind to design the cluster of high-rises was a commitment to mounting a portfolio of high aesthetics directly on the street. "Museum without walls" was what André Malraux in 1965 termed the ever-increasing availability of art to the culture-at-large, and fitting that rubric perfectly are the 15 major works that CityCenter is including in a fine-art program designed to complement these new architectural set pieces.

The collection is not strictly public art, which is commonly understood to be art either paid for with tax dollars or art put in a public place. The collection at CityCenter, under the curatorship of Las Vegas-based art consultant Michele Quinn, consists of privately held works displayed on private property that is open to the public.

CityCenter is one of the largest private building projects ever, a \$9 billion complex of 2,400 private residencies, three non-gaming hotels, a 4,000-room resort casino and 500,000 square feet of retail space. The artworks, both acquired or commissioned from internationally known contemporary artists, will be scattered through the public areas. Privately owned, privately situated, on public view and promoted as a public cultural amenity—I'm not sure Hughes would approve, as it might slip neatly around his pronouncement.

Frank Stella's large 1969 canvas of interlocking protractor shapes, "Damascus Gate Variation 1," will share billing with Richard Long's mud wall drawings that will measure 80 by 50 feet each when he's

finished. Nancy Rubins will re-create her 50-by-70-foot "Big Pleasure Point" assemblage of watercraft—originally a public-art piece in front of Lincoln Center in New York—and mount it on an exterior wall near one of the hotels. Maya Lin, best known as the architect of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., has cast the Colorado River in an 84-foot-long tongue of silver. And there will be a signature Jenny Holzer LED sign spanning 387 feet, and a gigantic eraser by the sculpting team of Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen.

Shopping malls and hotels have long purchased art for their premises as a way to establish identities that allude to wealth and leisure. Often the works were simply placed at the junction of pedestrian corridors and derided by critics as "plop art." The MGM Mirage collection is another order of endeavor, a collection with a consistent aesthetic of monumentalism that comments on the surroundings—sometimes explicit, sometimes not, but always there.

The enlarged pop iconography of the eraser, for example, or the outsized cartography of the river, the looming chaos of the

pleasure craft—you can see how they relate to one another and the scale and visual ego of the Strip. The siting of the works was carefully crafted by Quinn and the architects at the beginning of the process in order to emphasize those relationships, as well as two more considerations. Quinn notes that, as large as the pieces are, "They humanize the space because the buildings are so large, and the density of the property needs breaking up."

Quinn claims that this will be the largest collection of major monumental sculptures ever assembled by a corporation and made available to the public for free. The artworks will be an attraction in and of themselves for visitors and residents alike (in fact, there will be maps for self-guided tours), a strategy that will also reinforce the branding of CityCenter as one of the world's premier urban locales. If it works—and it doesn't hurt that MGM Mirage Chairman Jim Murren has a degree in art history and once aspired to be an architect—CityCenter will raise the bar for demonstrating how art can help resolve the tensions between public streets and private properties. ■

Opposite page:
Tony Cragg's
stainless-steel
"Bolt" (far left)
and a rendering of
the Nancy Rubins
sculpture that was
commissioned by
CityCenter.

This page: Henry
Moore's travertine
marble "Reclining
Connected Forms"
and (bottom)
"Damascus Gate
Variation I," a 1969
Frank Stella painting
that will hang
in Vdara.



the green



SH Architecture finds the perfect client in MaryKaye Cashman, and that relationship results in not only a LEED-Gold building but an inspired workplace.

dream

BY MATT JACOB

Photography by Peter Malinowski, InSite Architectural Photography



Sitting behind the desk in her office at the sparkling new Cashman Equipment Company headquarters in Henderson, MaryKaye Cashman chokes back tears as she talks about

the energy-efficient intricacies of the seven-building campus. The emotions flow not from finally getting some closure on the monumental three-year design and construction process. Rather, these are tears of compassion from a boss who has just given her company the gift of sustainability.

"It makes sense to me to provide an environment that is healthy for your employees, that respects the human spirit and that is a working environment that creates less tension," she says, lips quivering. "I think your employees give back what you give to them, so to the degree that I could do that ..."

Her voice cracks again, and she stops speaking, but her point is made: In relocating a family business from its North Las Vegas home of 27 years, MaryKaye could have selected a course of action that was much quicker, much cheaper, much less complicated and much less environmentally friendly. But that wasn't an option for the member of one of Las Vegas' founding families. She wanted—make that *demanded*—a new headquarters that, when all was said and done, would allow her to sleep easy at night knowing she had done right by her 320 employees, her hometown and her Earth.

This idea was conceived when MaryKaye and Ron Hall, AIA, her good friend and the chairman of SH Architecture, put together the plan to erect a 308,000-square-foot campus on St. Rose Parkway (near Spencer) that would leave no environmental stone unturned. From top (a roof set up for solar panels) to bottom (359 geothermal wells that run 400 feet deep) and from inside (the structural steel is 75 percent recycled) to out (native landscaping), Cashman Equipment is so energy efficient—45 percent more than a typical project of the same size—that SH Architecture expects it to earn Gold certification from the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) program.

SH has about 15 LEED-caliber projects completed or underway, according to its vice president, Eric Roberts, Associate AIA, who is in charge of Cashman Equipment's certification process. But Cashman was "by far the biggest effort we've ever done," he says. "The size and diversity of the space was a tough deal. It's tough to get a LEED-Gold [for a] 10,000-square-foot office building, but to do 300,000 square feet of diverse building space is a monumental task."

It helped that SH had a noble challenge to meet and a more-than-willing client. "As an architect, to come to work and say, 'We've got these great principles and design ideas that we know work, and

we've got an owner who sees the vision of implementing these practices and actually seeing them in action ...'" Roberts pauses, then adds, "Just a great project, great owner."

It's not uncommon for a client to have a green vision and then, at the last minute—no matter how much energy savings there would be down the road—change it due to budget concerns. In Cashman Equipment's case, the energy-efficient enhancements boosted the project's final bill by about 10 percent, which is expected to be recouped in five to seven years. And the plant was constructed to have a 30-year life.

"MaryKaye sees the long-term benefits," Roberts says. "They're going to be here in Southern Nevada for the long-term. They're Nevada residents, they have a history here and they plan on being here. So she understands the investment, whereas with some other clients, you might have to coach them as to the long-term benefits."

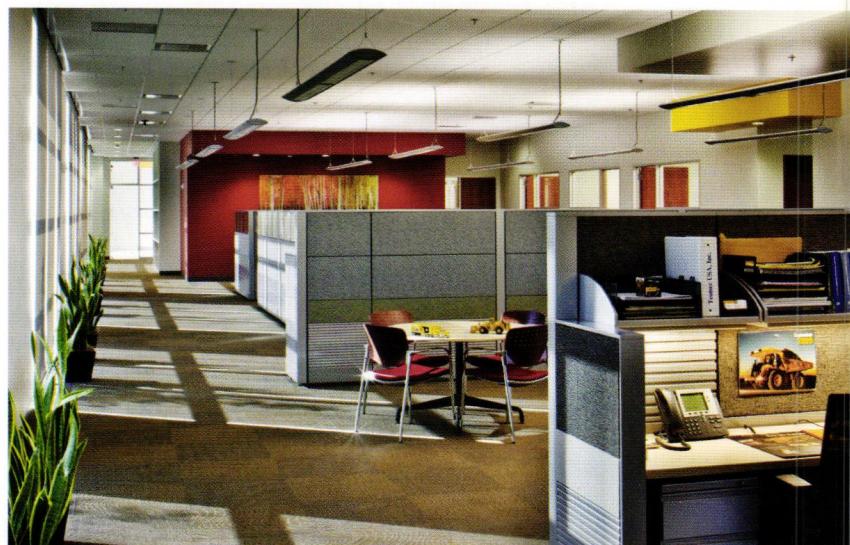
MaryKaye is not quite done yet. She has an even bolder goal: to make the necessary tweaks (including possibly adding those solar panels) to elevate the structures to LEED-Platinum status—the pinnacle of energy efficiency. (They were close to achieving that level during the LEED grading period, which was in progress at press time.)

"I have a really profound conviction that the United States needs to be an energy-independent country to make ourselves more self-sufficient," she says. And that starts with her own state: "I think it's ridiculous that Nevada—as sunny as it is—doesn't fully utilize solar energy."

Cashman Equipment will continue to do its part, now that its doors are open. Employees had been preparing a year in advance for their new workplace, led by "Green Team" representatives from various departments. The goal was to change the company's culture, from recycling everything in the main building to properly disposing of old batteries and used oil in the shop. Today that sort of responsibility has become more of a habit than a rule.

And that leads to the perfect ending for a project. Architects can design the most efficient building imaginable, but its performance ultimately hinges on continued acceptance and stewardship by the client and those who inhabit it.

"It's a Class A facility," Roberts says, "and I think we'll get some great reviews from the employees who use it. And those who frequent Cashman's facilities for rentals or repairs will find it to be a wonderful facility, too, and I think that means everything." ■





Natural light is a hallmark of the new Cashman Equipment, from offices (opposite) to the showroom (left). MaryKaye Cashman is pictured below.

GETTING GOLD FROM GREEN

Some of the sustainable highlights of the Cashman Equipment facility (3300 St. Rose Parkway), which is expected to achieve LEED Gold from the U.S. Green Building Council:

- The geothermal heating and cooling system, which required 359 400-foot-deep wells and 65 miles of pipe, reduces energy consumption by 45 percent.
- More than 90 percent of Cashman's employees—many of whom had to go outside to see the sun in their previous building—have an exterior view thanks to
- 3,500 high-performance glass panes that allow for maximum use of natural light.

- Automated Mecho Shades, interconnected by a central computer, help maintain quality daylight in the buildings without subjecting workers to glare. Sensors on the roof measure the outside conditions and tell the aluminum devices when to open and close to help maintain a moderate temperature inside.
- Large spaces, such as the one-acre, 20-bay service shop and the large-parts warehouse, feature solar tubes in the ceiling and retractable glass doors. The massive doors open and close quickly and remotely when earthmovers enter and exit, minimizing the amount of heat or cold entering.
- During the construction process, more than 800 tons (88 percent) of debris were diverted from landfills through recycling, and 40 percent of the project's materials came from the region, which is more than twice what's required by LEED.





THE
ANNUAL

THIS YEAR'S JURORS:

Edward M. Jones, AIA
Principal, Jones Studio, Phoenix

Wendy Pautz, AIA
Partner, LMN Architects, Seattle

Thomas Bitmar, AIA
Principal, Bitmar Architects
Bozeman, Montana

EXCELLENCE IN DESIGN AWARDS

The Excellence in Design Awards, presented each year by the Nevada Chapter of the AIA, honors the state's best architectural projects. The criteria include not only the quality of design but also a project's sustainable features and its overall contribution to the community. The program has been in existence for more than 25 years, but in light of the ever-expanding architecture profession, there are now four award categories: Architecture, for projects completed within the last five years; Regional and Urban Design, recognizing achievements that involve the expanding role of the architect in community development; Interior Architecture, acknowledging the architect's role in interior design; and Collaborative Achievement, recognizing design excellence through the combined efforts of clients, owners, contractors and architects.

The jurors were up front about the potential for bias when considering this project. "Was it a coincidence," they asked while seated in the AIA's conference room at the Fifth Street School, "that the renovation would be submitted for an award while providing great spaces for deliberation?" Let's simply call it added insight, which gave the jurors a firsthand appreciation of the charming 73-year-old school and its courtyards, breezeways and mature landscape, and showed how vital it is to the downtown area around Las Vegas Boulevard between Lewis and Clark avenues. KGA helped return the city's first permanent schoolhouse to a reasonable approximation of its original form (including the 1930s color scheme), with several modernizations (insulated windows, air-quality sensors, new lighting system) for the sake of comfort and energy-efficiency. The architects also helped give the 29,000-square-foot schoolhouse new purpose, turning the long-remuddled classrooms into spaces for a variety of cultural institutions (UNLV's Design Center, Nevada School of the Arts) and the gymnasium into a multipurpose center for public events. Overall, the jurors concluded, whether it's the AIA's sunny half-circle conference room or the school as a model for future restorations, it's difficult not to be impressed. "This is a quality project we hope will inspire other building owners to find a new use, as opposed to throwing away an earlier Las Vegas."

PHOTOS BY OPULENCE STUDIOS





The AIA's conference room.

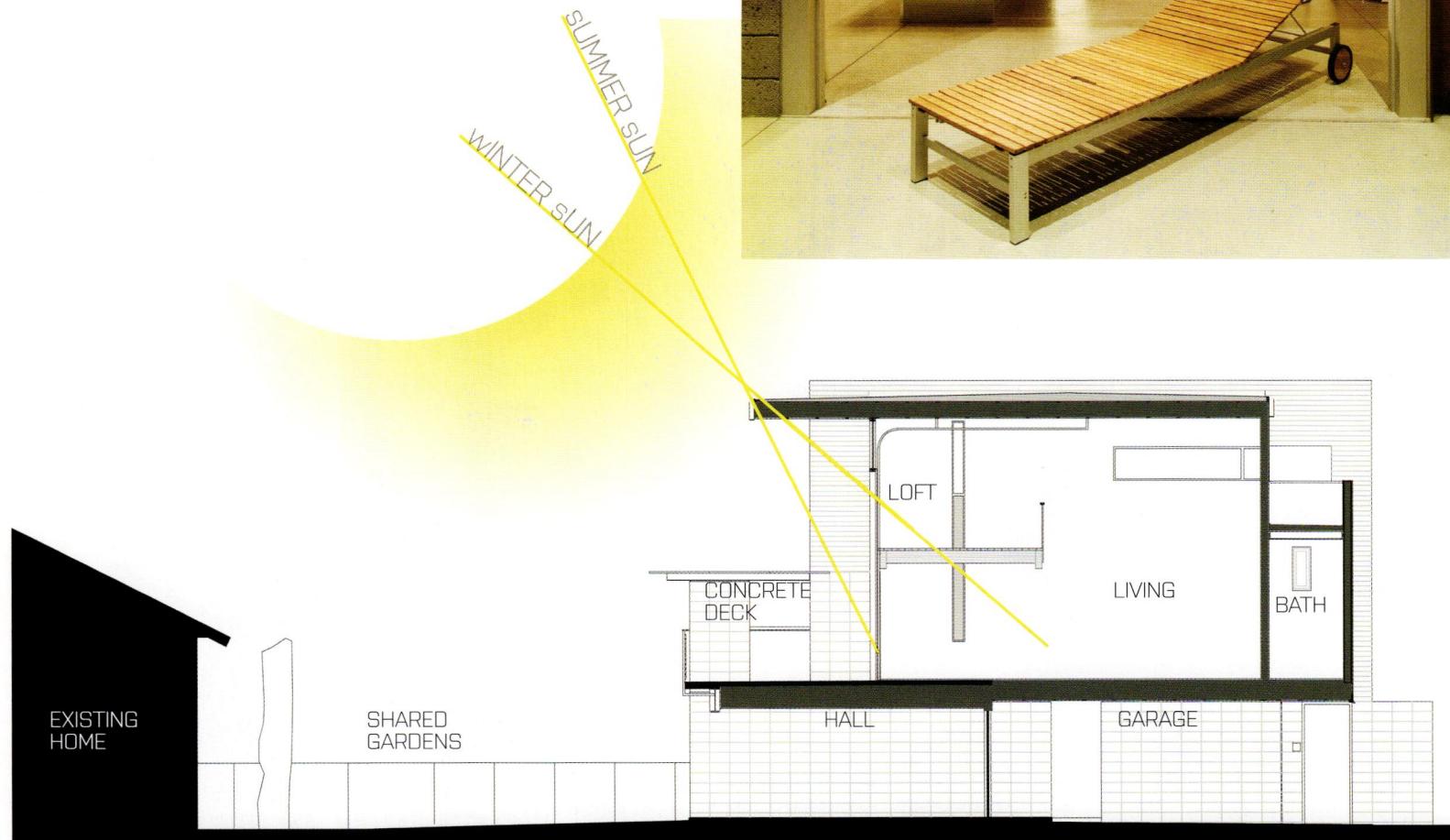
Opposite page: (top) the exterior of the conference room and (below) the school's shaded walkways

Block Party 4

ARCHITECTURE HONOR AWARD

Hawkins & Associates, Reno

The West is all about independence and wide-open spaces, but in this age of limited resources and Earth appreciation, adjustments must be made. Hawkins & Associates may have found the perfect contemporary compromise with Block Party 4. The two three-story, two-unit townhomes share yards and walls in an old Reno neighborhood, yet offer ample indoor/outdoor space and what the architect calls a "gracious feel" in each interior (one building has 1,000-square-foot units; the other's are 1,400). Jurors praised this urban infill project, completed in January 2008, for demonstrating "the inherent opportunities for sharing, spaciousness and sense of community without sacrificing privacy or convenience." What also turns a smart, resourceful concept into highly livable homes is the view of the sky and mountains from the second-floor balconies in back. When the occupants roll up the two-story glass "garage" door, their main living space opens to not only the deck but the Sierra Nevada. While that would make any Reno urbanite happy, the project's primary focus was sustainability. The orientation and strategically sized windows allow plenty of light and significant passive solar gains, while keeping the electric bill low (about \$1 per day) during the summer, thanks also to evaporative coolers. For those cold winter nights, there's an in-floor hydronic radiant heating system. And the jurors found the selection of materials (Cor-ten steel, cedar siding, concrete block) and details (such as overhanging roofs) attractive and "intelligent." Factor in how little space these infill residences take up and the result is a project that is "inherently environmentally responsible."





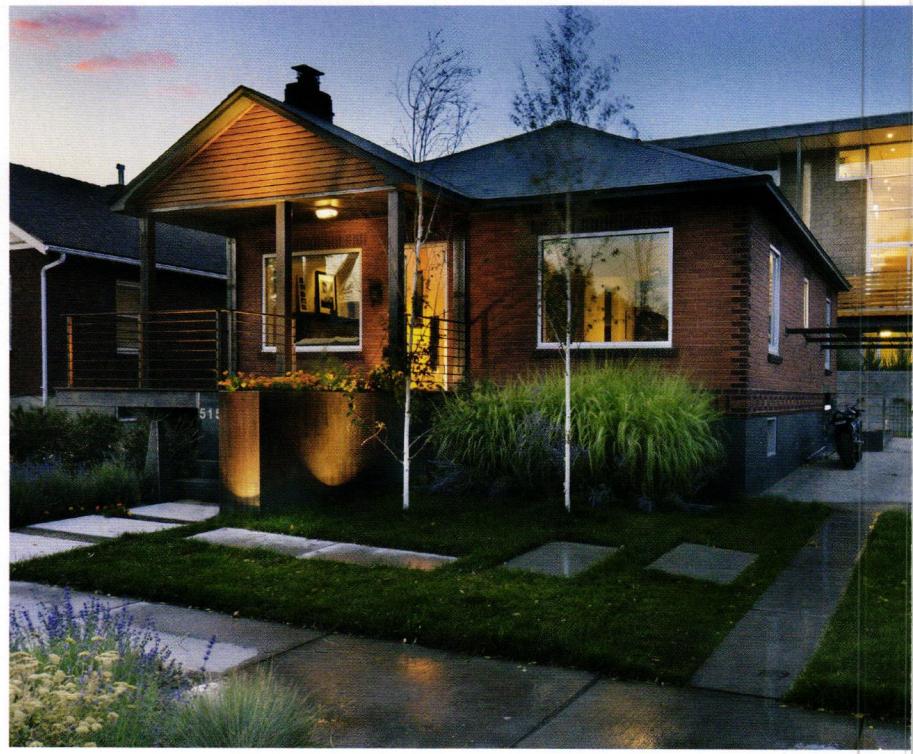
The rear of one of the townhomes.
Opposite page: The "garage" door
allows stylish indoor/outdoor living.

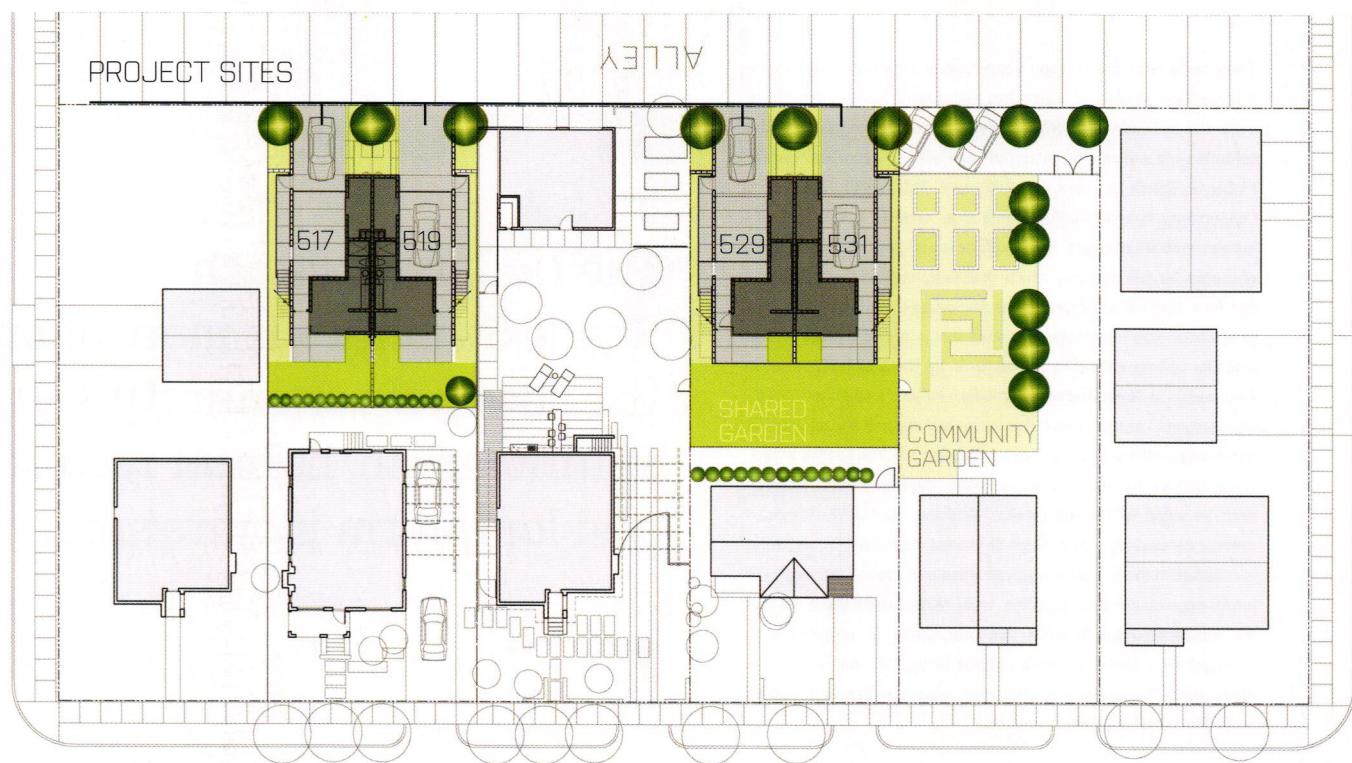
Block Party 4

COLLABORATIVE ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Hawkins & Associates, Reno

And now for the rest of the story of Block Party 4 ... The project, set between a trio of 70-year-old brick bungalows and an alley, is a piece of a bigger urban infill puzzle. Long story short: Two architects (Jack Hawkins and Baron Hershberger, both AIA) and one artisan (Paolo Cividino) each purchased and renovated one of the bungalows on the rundown residential block, which was rezoned to accommodate a collaborative idea involving high-density, affordable, infill residential design. As part of the project the two architects designed townhomes for themselves (they'd lease their old homes upon moving in), as well as a pair of townhomes on speculation (adding up to Block Party 4). The artisan and architects also joined forces with a contractor to, according to Hawkins & Associates, "create a unique, sustainable, well-designed and constructed community project." That contractor (Darin Murphy) contributed a time-and-money-efficient staging of construction: the artisan performed all of the steel fabrication; and a supporting cast that included the city planning department tied new and old into one cohesive block that features shared landscaping, a community garden and visitor parking. "It takes special vision to see value in derelict 1930 bungalows," the jurors commented. "It takes courage to gamble your savings on the vision, and it damn sure takes dogged persistence in dealing with any municipal planning department. Perhaps most of all, it takes unique faith in your friends to make them partners."





The Block Party 4 townhomes
were integrated into the backyards
of three old bungalows.



McCarran Ranch Shade Structure

COLLABORATIVE ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Cathexes Architecture, Reno

This simple structure of wood, copper, steel and concrete along the Truckee River in Washoe County has a simple purpose, as expressed by its title, but under the surface it gets wonderfully complicated. The centuries-old site was first used by the Paiutes, then it was part of McCarran Ranch for more than 100 years. This century the Nature Conservancy has reconstructed the river channel to "reverse the human-induced changes" on the 305 acres under its watch. Except, of course, for this one spot, which, thanks to an extensive collaboration by a number of organizations (including union apprenticeship programs), was imaginatively turned into a public memorial and place for resting, gathering and performing. The architects describe their design as "evocative of both modern structure and native building traditions," and the result has visual and organic appeal. It looks and feels as if it belongs—and has for some time. The beams, in fact, while structurally sound, will eventually "develop natural features such as slight twists and cracks." And the old Native American method of weaving willow twigs to protect from the sun and wind is reflected in the structure's woven wood and copper. Although the jurors appreciated such qualities, what really turned them on was the complicated collaboration that conceived and executed such a project. "The McCarran Ranch Shade Structure," they wrote, "is more about the power of community spirit, volunteerism, habitat restoration and long-term inspiration."

“ ”

The McCarran Ranch Shade Structure is more about the power of community spirit, volunteerism, habitat restoration and long-term inspiration.

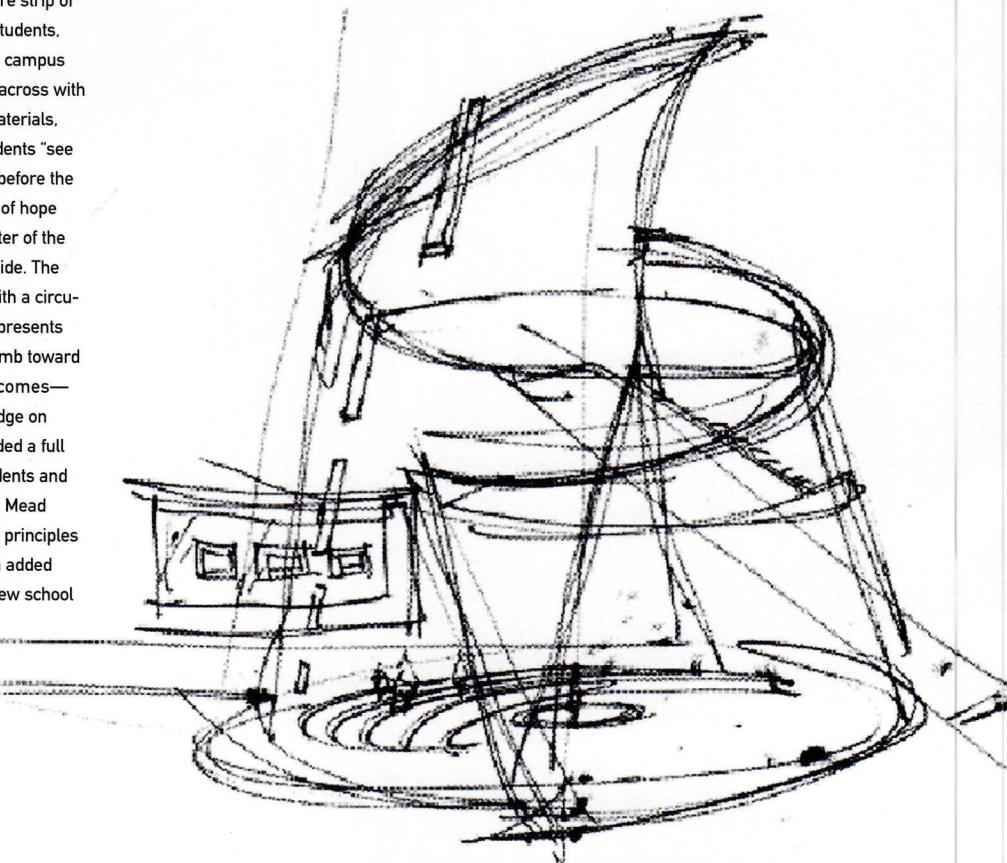
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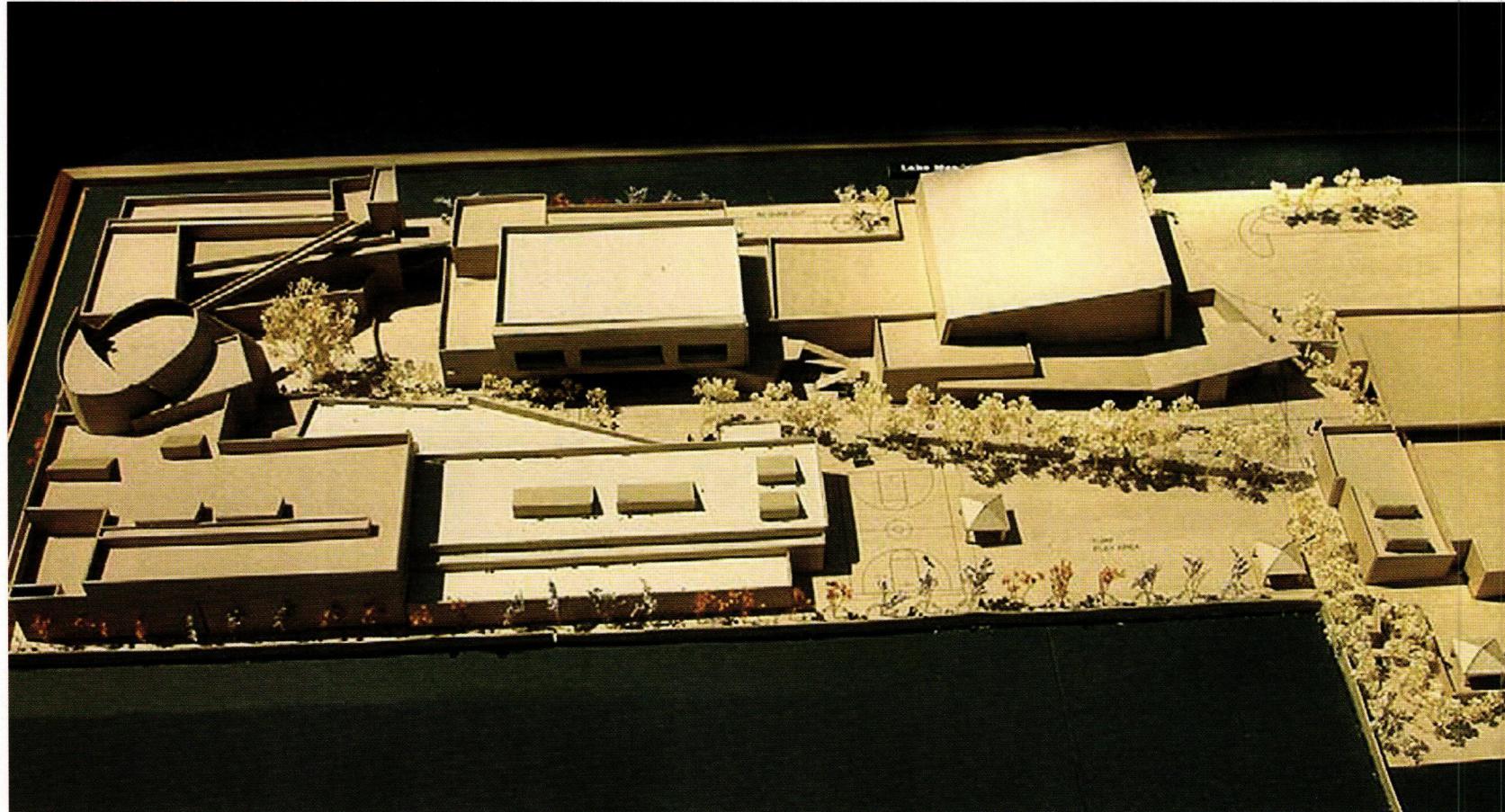


The structure's Native American-influenced woven wood-and-copper walls.

More than five years after its master plan was conceived, the Agassi Academy has become a full-fledged campus. The high school building now sits at the far west end of the 7.8-acre strip of land, where it serves as the ultimate destination for all students, not just the last four grades. The architects designed the campus as a linear journey from K through 12, getting this point across with "the placement of structures and the sophistication of materials, detailing and scale of the buildings." In other words, students "see where they are going and where they have been." Long before the high school was built, a "tree of life" served as a symbol of hope as well as the building to come. It now stands in the center of the courtyard, and students must pass by it before going inside. The high school commons furthers the journey metaphor, with a circular gathering spot on the floor beneath a rotunda that represents "the pinnacle and mountain the students are trying to climb toward graduation." This final step in the academy journey comes—literally and figuratively—upon the Commencement Bridge on the commons roof terrace. This final phase, which included a full gymnasium, completes a vision of the future for the students and is a beacon of hope for the at-risk neighborhood at Lake Mead and J Street. "It's an excellent example of good planning principles informing the architecture," the jurors wrote. "Aspiration added another less tangible yet more meaningful quality to a new school for low-income families."



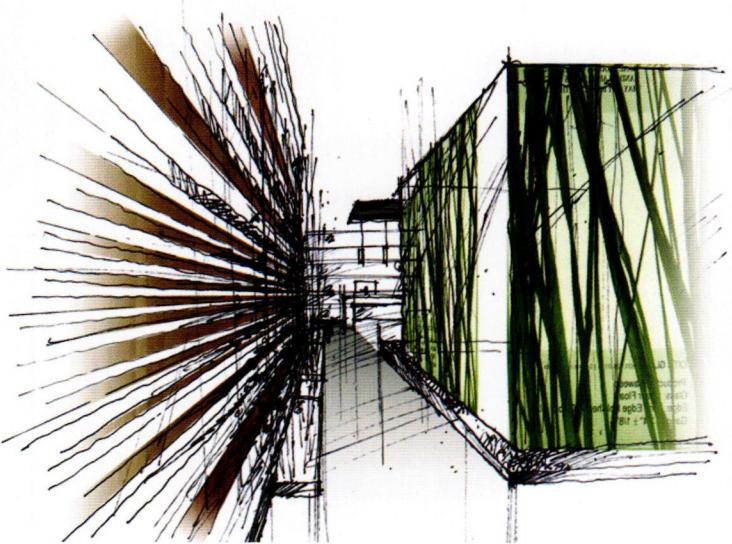
PHOTOS COURTESY CARPENTER SELLERS ARCHITECTS





The high school rotunda, inside.
out (above) and in the model (left).

A little tranquility couldn't hurt a doctor's office—especially when his specialty is pain management. AssemblageSTUDIO took a sterile, overly compartmentalized space and turned it into an oasis of healing. The first remedy was to create a sense of free-flowing openness by turning functional spaces into "spatial objects that patients move around and through." For example, "floating" glass boxes divide the two lobbies, but still allow a visual connection around the perimeter. Then the architect brought in daylight wherever practical through a variety of interesting means, including handsome wood slats and translucent acrylic. Another purpose of this light was to boost "visual interest" in the office—through shadow play, etc.—but also to reduce energy consumption. Other sustainable features include motion-sensor lighting controls and finishes created from locally available wood and rock. "We felt Nalani went well beyond surface treatment and planning," the jurors wrote. "It is first about making space and providing openness and light, followed by maintaining an appropriate level of program containment." For patients, that means a place conducive to comfort and care.





The view from one lobby
and (opposite page) the other.

PHOTOS COURTESY assemblageSTUDIO

“

We felt Nalani went well beyond surface treatment and planning. It is first about making space and providing openness and light, followed by maintaining an appropriate level of program containment.

”

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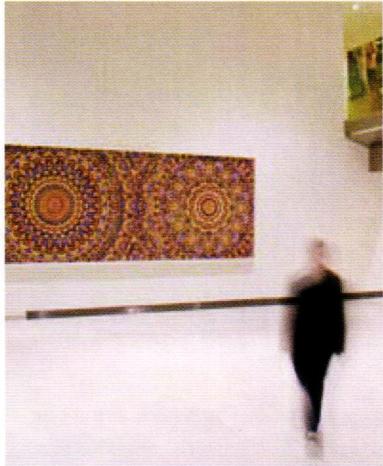
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Designing Nevada's Renewable Future

What will it take to pull Nevada out of this recession? The answer is simple. The building industry needs to be jump-started. And how do we do that? Get architects working on new projects, retrofitting projects and preservation projects. In order to generate jobs for the construction industry, we need to be able to pick up the pencil and get busy designing. Then architects can hire the contractors, engineers, consultants, interior designers, landscapers and all related professionals, who, in turn, hire the construction workers and subcontractors. It begins with the pencil, and it ends with a healthy economy.

While the Stimulus Package is a well-meaning beginning, the creators and executors did not look far enough down the road. The "shovel-ready" plan started in the middle—and then stopped generating jobs at the same time. Shovel-ready projects are once-and-done, leaving us in the same place we were before. We must fill the pipeline with jobs, and that means generating "pencil-ready" projects and hiring the architects and design professionals to get the ball rolling.

For every \$100 million of capital funds invested in our state's building infrastructure, we create jobs for 10,000 Nevadans. We cannot fix our problems with "shovel-ready" solutions alone. We need to think on a larger scale and create "pencil-ready" projects that benefit all Nevadans. And by the way, those pencils need to be green in order to build a strong, sustainable economy for our state.

BUILDING CONNECTIONS

There are more than 800 associations and community service organizations in Las Vegas. While each has a different mission, they are all truly working toward one goal: building a better Las Vegas. Can you imagine the difference that could be made, and the kind of community we could have, if all these organizations combined energies and worked collaboratively? If all our resources were pooled and the enthusiasm and strength of our volunteers and dedicated members were unified, there is nothing that could not be accomplished.

Architecture is not only about the design and construction of buildings, it is about the future. It is about solving problems and creating



The 2007 "CANstruction" jurors' favorite winner: "Champagne with Cheese and Crackers" by KGA Architects.

healthy, safe, sustainable and livable communities. The American Institute of Architects is a professional association for architects, related design professionals and those who have an interest in and an appreciation for architecture. This year the Las Vegas Chapter of the AIA hopes to reach all of those individuals in our community through our "Building Stronger Connections" campaign. By building these connections, we can continue to create a better, more sustainable and livable Las Vegas.

ARCHITECTURE WEEK IN LAS VEGAS

April 13-18 will be our annual celebration of the city's architecture and design, as well as of the community itself. It enhances the public's awareness of architecture and those who have designed and built it. Events include the unveiling of this magazine; the annual "Unbuilt Las Vegas" design awards and exhibit, showcasing those dream projects for our city; the AIA Las Vegas High School Design Awards, recognizing young designers and future architects; and the annual "CANstruction" competition and exhibit to benefit the Three Square Food Bank.

ECO-ECONOMY! DESIGNING A RENEWABLE FUTURE IN NEVADA

The annual AIA Nevada Design Conference, September 16-18 in the Fifth Street School, will focus on the economy and environment. As we work toward recovery from the recession, the statewide conference will explore the opportunities offered through smart design, renewable energy and our abundant natural resources, which can generate jobs and stimulate the economy, thereby improving the profession and our communities. We will investigate the role design plays and how architects are helping to produce change in Nevada.

The conference, which is open to all who might be interested, provides excellent networking activities, such as the 36th annual AIA Las Vegas Golf Tournament, the What's New Product Show and the AIA Nevada Excellence in Design and Distinguished Service Awards program. For more information on the conference, sponsorships or to register, go to aianevada.org or aialasvegas.org after June 1. ■

AIA AWARDS

2008 AIA NEVADA DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARDS

The annual AIA Nevada Distinguished Service Awards recognize the individuals and organizations who have made the most significant contributions to advancing the profession of architecture and to bettering their communities. Nominations in each category are made by AIA Nevada members, and the nominees are required to provide a submittal binder that meets the criteria of each specific category. Submittals are reviewed by a panel of three jurors. The 2008 panel consisted of Kim Fernandez, AIA, Tucson, Arizona; Bruce Hawtin, FAIA, Jackson, Wyoming; and Chris Green, AIA, Avon, Colorado.

ALLIED MEMBER AWARD

This honor is presented to the individual AIA Allied member who has contributed significantly to the profession of architecture and his or her community through his or her membership in the local chapter. The 2008 award was presented to **PATRICIA HEGGE**, owner of Office Pavilion in Reno. She has been a member of the AIA Northern Nevada Chapter for more than 10 years and has worked in a variety of capacities to support the chapter's outreach programs.



YOUNG ARCHITECT AWARD

This award is given to the architect who in the first 10 years of licensure has shown exceptional leadership in design, education and service to the profession. "It is said that a measurement of our profession is by the quality of those we pull up behind us," jury chair Kim Fernandez, AIA, said. "In the review of Nevada's young architects, those at an early stage in their careers, we found bright, talented professionals. We found ones who demonstrated commitment to not only their profession and professional organization, but also to personal responsibility and their communities." The jury truly struggled with this selection and eventually agreed two people merited this award, each for their own special reasons:

KEN BARTLETT, AIA, has consistently demonstrated an energetic commitment to serving the AIA, his community and his emerging practice. He has been a member of AIA Northern Nevada for more than 10 years and has been recognized numerous times for his design work.



DEEPIKA PADAM, AIA, has shown fantastic leadership in very important areas, including ARE workshops, IDP, YAF,

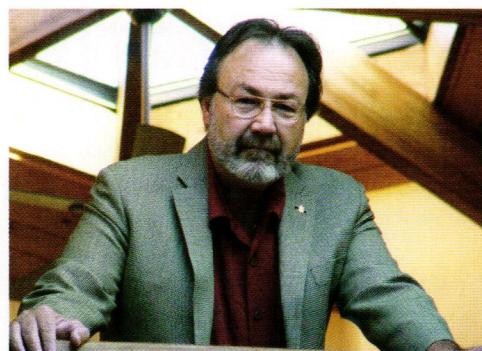
WMR, LEED, COTE, USGBC, and community service. She is president of the U.S. Green Building Council in Nevada and president-elect of the AIA Las Vegas Chapter.

THE AIA NEVADA ARCHITECTURE FIRM AWARD

This award is the highest honor that AIA Nevada can bestow on an architecture firm. It recognizes a firm that has consistently produced distinguished architecture for at least 10 years, has a commitment to the AIA and the profession of architecture, and has been of service to the community in which they are located.



For the second time in 20 years, **TATE SNYDER KIMSEY ARCHITECTS** was selected to receive this most distinguished recognition. "Firms are the vehicles for our [architects'] trips and through which great things happen with leadership and vision," Kim Fernandez, AIA, jury chair said. "Some firms epitomize the necessary commitment to design, to their staff, to involvement in their community and to the AIA. Some firms produce a distinguished body of work and are recognized for it. Some firms do it all—over and over again. We are honored to recognize Tate Snyder Kimsey Architects for the second time with the AIA Nevada Architecture Firm Award."



THE AIA NEVADA SILVER MEDAL

The Silver Medal is the highest honor that can be awarded to an architect in Nevada. It recognizes a lifetime of distinguished service to the profession of architecture and is only awarded to those who have made a significant contribution to the betterment of their community. The 2008 recipient of this prestigious award is **RIC LICATA, AIA**, who throughout his career has demonstrated commitment, energy, leadership and passion for his profession. He has served as president of both his AIA Northern Nevada Chapter and the AIA Nevada Chapter. He represents the AIA Western Mountain Region on the AIA National Board of Directors. In addition, he teaches architecture and is a sought-after speaker on the subjects of renewable energy and conservation. He is an exemplary role model for young architects and has produced a lasting legacy in education, practice and service to his community. ■



BY JAY JONES



PHOTO BY MILES AND RYAN REASON, STUDIO WEST PHOTOGRAPHY

Jeff Roberts (left), AIA, and
Randy Spitzmesser, AIA, on location.

Double Platinum Hits

Two architects behind the Springs Preserve's LEED success share the joys and agonies of what it took to get there



In a city such as Las Vegas, it's not surprising that when people hear the words "certified platinum," their first thought is Cher or Elton John. But in the architecture world, the term has an even more fabulous meaning.

Platinum is the most prestigious of the four LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certifications granted by the U.S. Green Building Council. And two of America's 100 Platinum-certified projects are not only here in our city, they're neighbors at the Springs Preserve, a 180-acre showcase of Las Vegas' origins and its sustainable future.

The Preserve opened in June 2007, but it began 10 years earlier when Lucchesi Galati and other design teams began working on plans for a project that would promote the preservation of our natural resources. The firm, led by architect Jeff Roberts, AIA, oversaw the design of the Desert Living Center, a five-building complex that features the Sustainability Gallery, classrooms, research labs and gardens. Another local firm, Tate Snyder Kimsey Architects, designed the neighboring visitor center, called the Origen Experience, which houses a variety of exhibits about Southern Nevada culture and history. Architect Randy Spitzmesser, AIA, was the longtime captain of that project.

Architecture Las Vegas recently sat down with Roberts and Spitzmesser in a Springs Preserve conference room to discuss their unprecedented

Platinum successes and the lessons learned along the way.

What about the Springs Preserve buildings most impressed the USGBC?

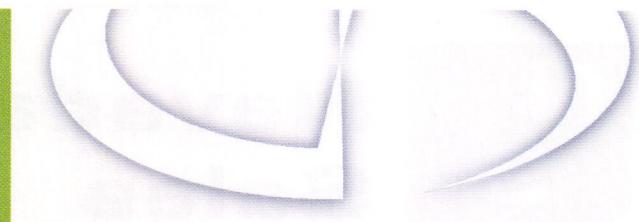
Spitzmesser: I think the fact that you had a whole campus dedicated to sustainable solutions.

Roberts: This is the largest visitor attraction in the LEED system in the United States. At 180 acres, this is a significant attempt to do multiple projects and bring them in at very high LEED ratings and then perform as a visitor attraction, too. ... There's a lot of shock [within the green-building community] that you could have two Platinum buildings on the same site. But it's even more shocking to them that those buildings are in Las Vegas.

Spitzmesser: The perception is that Las Vegas is a land of excess and waste. To see two sustainable solutions side by side really amazes people.

Is it much more expensive to build to LEED standards?

Roberts: I'm not going to beat around the bush. This building [the Desert Living Center] was way above and beyond in cost, but it's also a Platinum building, and when you push to Platinum you've got a much more integrated design process. All of your mechanical engineers have to work seamlessly with your daylighting strategies, and we had a daylighting consultant that specifically worked with the lighting engineer to minimize lighting use. ... Then a contractor ►►



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has to be able to deliver that. ... We've proven as a firm that designing buildings at the LEED Silver and Gold levels has no additional cost. It's much more challenging with Platinum.

Spitzmesser: When you put [sustainable] amenities into a design solution, it really heightens the performance level of the building. In other words, buildings become more energy-efficient and they use less water. ... So what you're doing is building high-performance value into the project up front and then achieving a payback somewhere down the road.

So how soon do you expect to see payback from these buildings?

Roberts: These buildings take anywhere from 12 to 14 months to tweak, to dial in, to make adjustments. So we've only got about four to five months of real hard data [as of October 2008].

Spitzmesser: It's a little early to actually analyze the savings and return on the investment. But after we get a full cycle of seasons, I think we'll find it's going to be a tremendous amount of energy savings and water savings.

Roberts: Hopefully then [the Springs Preserve] will start building a live online database of how the buildings are performing, which ones are being more efficient. And all of that will become more and more valuable for the design profession, for the local building community, to understand the successes and the lessons to be learned from this project.

What aspects of the design worked particularly well?

Roberts: I am pleased at the integration of the gardens and the landscapes and the buildings—the whole campus. ... One of the most gratifying and one of the most surprising is that, in the gardens, we have constructed a wastewater treatment system. It's a specially designed wetland. We have no sewage that leaves this site. All of it flows downhill and then we're using anaerobic material, natural reeds, plant life to clean and process sewage. ... It all comes out as high-quality water, and that water is put back in the buildings to flush toilets.

Are there any aspects of this project that disappoint you?

Roberts: I have had a little sour taste in my mouth about LEED and the rating process. These buildings pushed so far that there were LEED reviewers who didn't know how to review them. We have one building that has no mechanical systems in it. It's to test living in the desert with no standard mechanical systems. It's all passively heated and passively cooled. The LEED reviewers didn't know how to put an energy model to that, so they did not know how to review a building with no air-conditioning systems. ... [And] there's one LEED credit that we could never get on this particular project: using zero water for the landscape. It was important that the botanical garden be designed to not only teach xeriscape principles for indigenous species but also for desert species not from the Mojave, and those plants require supplemental water to survive in our climate.

Spitzmesser: My biggest disappointment is that Las Vegas and the state of Nevada have not acted sooner to get out there and promote sustainable solutions in their communities. That's what really dis-



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